

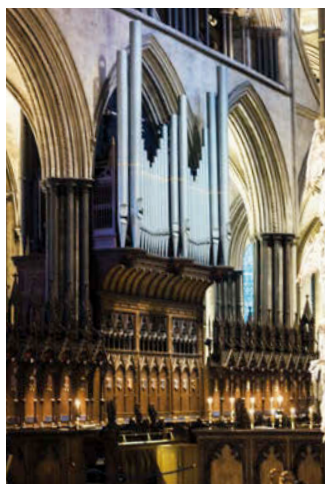
# CHOIR & ORGAN

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May/June 2020

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## SALISBURY RESTORED

The cathedral's  
Father Willis  
organ is back up  
and running –  
how is it faring?

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# KRZYSZTOF PENDERECKI

Celebrating the life of the  
Polish composer 1933-2020

**FROM THE ARCHIVE**



**CHOIR & ORGAN OFFERS**  
*The Work of Gray & Davison, 1772-1890*  
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## GRAY & DAVISON

The path to becoming leading  
organ builders of their time

## NEW WINE, OLD SKIN

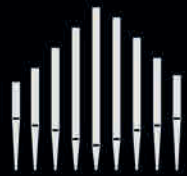
Repurposing Charles Fisk's Opus 46  
for a new home in Austin, Texas

## FELLOWSHIP OF SONG

How Paul Mealor developed a creative  
partnership with a US chamber choir







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## Spirit levels

What else is there to write about? Unless you've been in a time warp, you will already know of the devastation to people's lives caused by the coronavirus: businesses folded and jobs lost; schools, colleges and universities closed, children being home-taught by stressed parents; shops, theatres, cinemas, pubs, restaurants and even places of worship closed, as all forms of physical social interaction are banned; those self-isolating driven closer to the brink of mental health problems; and, for musicians, concerts and festivals cancelled, with loss of income for artists and organisers alike, and organ builders' contracts on hold. Worst of all, of course, is those who are suffering, and dying, from the virus, and the anguish consequently visited on their families.

As in all adversity, it seems, human ingenuity springs to the fore with manifold ways of getting through it, thanks in large part to the internet. If you haven't yet caught up with what's on offer, turn to our News (p.6) for some suggestions: virtual choirs invite you to join in from the confines of your living room – you can even perform *Messiah* with professional instrumentalists and soloists; singing teachers offer lessons; skills and resources are being freely shared; and there is no shortage of virtual concerts of music of all descriptions. Young organists can even take part in a virtual competition, run by St Edmundsbury Cathedral. And mercifully, wit is in no short supply either, as words alluding to the virus and self-isolation are newly scripted to anything from pointed chant to a song from a G&S opera.



Strangely, when the lockdown was announced, I began to feel less stressed. Not only can we do nothing about the circumstances, but it has had the effect of recalibrating life and its priorities. I have found myself worrying less about what is out of my control, and listening to more music, being aware of the wind in my face and the heart-stopping fanfare of a skylark rocketing out of the undergrowth. I'm lucky I have

somewhere pleasant to walk; but this isn't essential – I'm hearing stories of how others are shielding their mental wellbeing, whether deliberately or instinctively, by only checking the news once a day; re-listening to a CD collection or the complete works of J.S. Bach (surely it must be over by then?); watching humorous or creative television programmes; delighting in the signs of a long-awaited spring – in short, celebrating the good that may come out of bad. Writing this at Easter, isn't this one way to understand resurrection?

*In the wake of the disruption caused by the outbreak of COVID-19, we will be publishing bimonthly issues of Choir & Organ as a temporary measure for May/June and July/August. To ensure that subscribers don't miss out, we will extend your subscription term to guarantee that you receive the full number of issues you have paid for on your subscription. Should you have any queries regarding your subscription, please feel free to contact our customer services team on +44 (0)1722 716997 or [subscriptions@markallengroup.com](mailto:subscriptions@markallengroup.com).*

Maggie Hamilton

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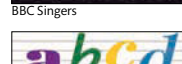
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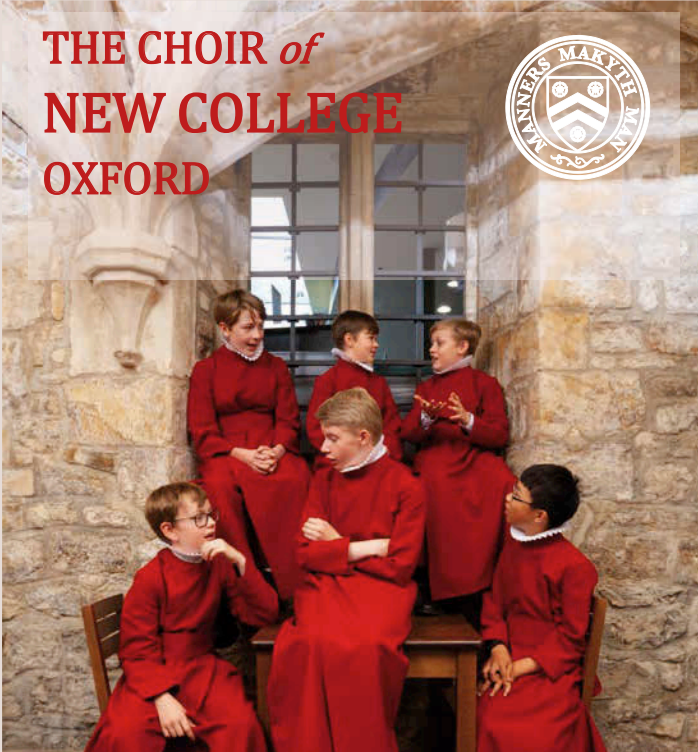

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Each year we hold our chorister open day in June for all interested families. The planned date is **SATURDAY 13 JUNE** but it is not certain that we will be able to hold the open day in chapel. But there will be plenty of material on the choir's website for all families interested in choristerships, including features, video clips and an interview with the organist, Robert Quinney. Please see the choir website for updates.

*There will be an opportunity to register interest online. Auditions will be held January 2021 for boys in year 2 for a place in year 3 in September 2021.*

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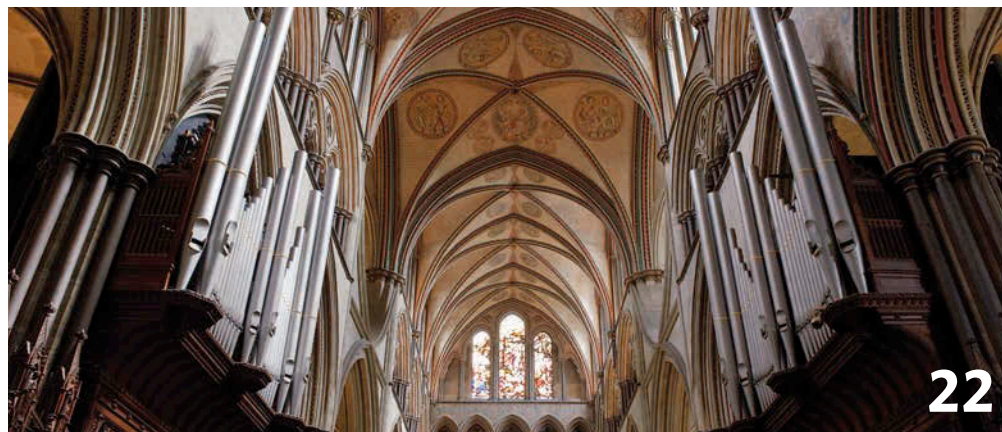
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## STAY MUSICALLY CONNECTED

THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS has sent shockwaves across the classical music world, cancelling events, premieres, festivals and concerts and leaving many people within the industry without work. However, online initiatives have been springing up left, right and centre, enabling those self-isolating and remaining at home to stay musically connected.

British choral conductor Gareth Malone has launched the **Great British Home Chorus**, aiming to bring amateur and professional singers and instrumentalists together from around the country ([decca.com/greatbritishhomechorus](http://decca.com/greatbritishhomechorus)). In a similar vein, conductor Victoria Longdon has set up the **Stay at Home Choir**, which offers singers the opportunity to vote for projects and join a virtual choir ([stayathomechoir.com](http://stayathomechoir.com); see Q&A at [bit.ly/2UG36Nf](http://bit.ly/2UG36Nf)). On 31 March the **Self-Isolation Choir** was launched, inviting housebound singers to rehearse weekly for a virtual performance of Handel's *Messiah* – accompanied by a specially home-recorded orchestra of

professional instrumentalists and soloists – on 31 May ([theselfisolationchoir.com](http://theselfisolationchoir.com)).

The **Royal School of Church Music** has launched a range of online initiatives ([bit.ly/2JsAMre](http://bit.ly/2JsAMre)); and many singing teachers have taken to giving online lessons, including tenor/choirmaster Jeff Stewart ([bit.ly/2Ux6SIM](http://bit.ly/2Ux6SIM)).

For those seeking resources, the **Royal College of Organists** (RCO) has announced several initiatives to support organists at this time. These include increased access to educational resources, online tuition and regular updates. The iRCO online learning platform has been made available to all organists worldwide, while anyone wishing to receive regular updates from the RCO can subscribe at [rco.org.uk](http://rco.org.uk). Meanwhile, from **Hereford Cathedral**, Peter Dyke shares thoughts and a performance of Pachelbel's variations on the chorale 'Was Gott tut', composed as a response to the plague in late 17th-century Germany ([bit.ly/3dHZwK9](http://bit.ly/3dHZwK9)).

Among the many virtual performances now on offer, **Houston Chamber Choir**

has launched a daily podcast 'With One Accord', aiming to bring solace to people during the crisis ([houstonchamberchoir.org](http://houstonchamberchoir.org)), while the **Voces8 Foundation** has launched #livefromhome, presenting performances and interactive singing videos, live workshops and interviews with singers and guests. The videos can be viewed on Facebook, Instagram or YouTube.

Ariel AVANT brings the **Robinson Recitals**, calling on classical instrumentalists and vocalists to curate and perform online performances, specifically aimed at people in retirement homes and communities ([arielavant.org](http://arielavant.org)), while London-based startup Tutti has launched **Creative Skills**, an online marketplace for creatives all over the world to share their skills ([creative-skills.sharetribe.com](http://creative-skills.sharetribe.com)).

New projects are materialising each day, so readers are encouraged to keep an eye on social media and the website for the latest information.

■ For further information about these and other initiatives, visit [choirandorgan.com](http://choirandorgan.com).

▼ Voces8 present interactive videos, workshops and interviews at #livefromhome



KALPO KIKVAS



# VIRTUAL ORGAN COMPETITION

YOUNG ORGANISTS MISSING OUT on live competitions this summer can now enter a virtual competition launched by the music department at St Edmundsbury Cathedral.

Musicians aged 22 and under are invited to upload a video recital in mp4 format to enter one of three categories, from Beginners (up to Grade 5) to Advanced.

The deadline for entries is 6 June and prizes include organ lessons with David Briggs and music vouchers worth £50-£500.

Alongside the organ competition, the cathedral is running composition and piano competitions, for which the deadlines are 23 and 16 May (respectively).

Acting director of music Richard Cook says, 'I am delighted that we are able to offer these two virtual competitions which I hope will give young musicians the opportunity to make music even in these challenging times.'

The competition is launched at a time when music competitions, festivals and events all over the world are being cancelled in order to reduce the spread of coronavirus and comply with government advice. A virtual competition is one of the many ways in which musicians are finding innovative ways to adapt to lockdown, social distancing and self-isolation.

To find out more about the competition, contact Richard Cook on [admin@stedscathedral.org](mailto:admin@stedscathedral.org).

**Deadline: 6 June.** [stedscathedral.org](http://stedscathedral.org)

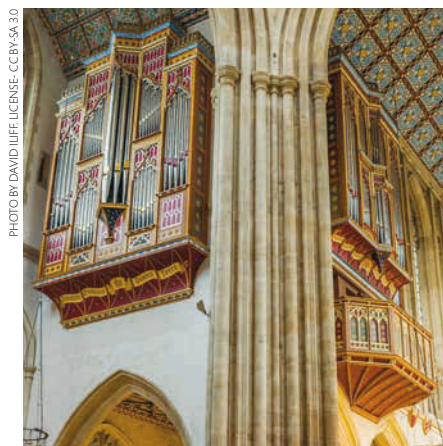


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▲ St Edmundsbury Cathedral invites young players to enter a Virtual Organ Competition

# CAOS SUMMER ORGAN COURSE

THE CAMBRIDGE ACADEMY OF ORGAN STUDIES, in association with Les Amis des Orgues de Moulins, has announced its summer course in France.

The Moulins/Toulouse Organ Academy will take place on 16-21 August, divided between Moulins Cathedral, and Notre-Dame de la Dalbade and the Basilica of Saint-Sernin in Toulouse; the tutor will be Moulins Cathedral *titulaire* Alexis Droy.

This well-established course offers places for 5-6 advanced players over the age of 18 to study in depth on three historic organs in France. The cost of the course is €350 (€300 for students in full-time education), which includes tuition and travel from Moulins to Toulouse. Observers are also welcome (€30 per day).

Repertoire for the course includes Widor's Symphony no.6, and selected works by Jehan Alain.

Moulins's Cathédrale Notre-Dame-de-l'Annonciation has a mechanical action III/49 Merklin instrument (1888); Notre-Dame de la Dalbade in Toulouse has a 47-stop instrument by local builder Puget (1888); and Saint-Sernin is renowned for its III/54 Cavaillé-Coll (1888), considered one of the most important organs in France.

For applications, contact Anne Page at [a.page@ram.ac.uk](mailto:a.page@ram.ac.uk); full details may be found at [cambridgeorganacademy.org](http://cambridgeorganacademy.org).



GIOVANNESCUOLAZ2006

▲ The Cavaillé-Coll organ in Saint-Sernin

## IN BRIEF

**David Titterington** has been announced as chair of the jury for the tenth Northern Ireland International Organ Competition (NIIOC), which is scheduled to take place in Armagh on 23-26 Aug. Titterington will be joined on the panel by Sophie Véronique Cauchefér-Choplin and David Hill. [niioc.com](http://niioc.com)

**St John's Smith Square** has announced its closure until at least 27 May 2020. A statement said: 'We are working with all those who have been scheduled to perform ... to try and arrange rescheduling of performances at a later date and we will publish details of these shortly.' [sjss.org.uk](http://sjss.org.uk)

The **Musicians' Union Coronavirus Hardship Fund** offers £200 grants to members affected by COVID-19. A report published at the end of March revealed that musicians across the UK were estimated to have lost £13.9m in earnings due to the pandemic; 90 per cent of those in the industry are said to have been affected, with job opportunities down 69 per cent on the same time last year. [musiciansunion.org.uk](http://musiciansunion.org.uk)

The **Gstaad Menuhin Festival** has announced its 2020 programme with the theme of 'Vienna'. The festival is due to run from 17 Jul to 6 Sep; artists include Iveta Apkalna in a recital on the new organ of Rougemont's Saint-Nicolas church, and René Jacobs conducting the RIAS Kammerchor in Beethoven's *Missa solemnis*. [gstaadmenuhinfestival.ch](http://gstaadmenuhinfestival.ch)

The Musicians' Union has appointed **Tom Watson**, the former Labour party deputy leader, as its new UK Music chair.

Rescheduled events include:

**Oberammergau Passion Play** (to 2022).

**Organ Reframed** (to 3-5 Sep 2020).

**Salisbury Cathedral St John Passion** (to 27 Mar 2021); David Briggs/Mahler Symphony no.2 (to 23 Sep) 2020.



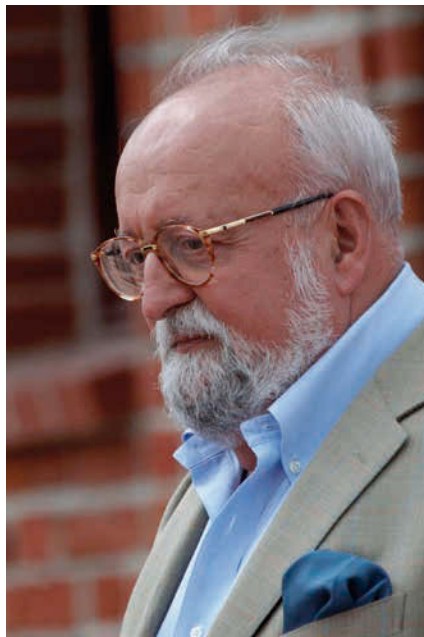
## PAST LIVES

### KRZYSZTOF PENDERECKI (1933-2020)

The Polish composer and conductor Krzysztof Penderecki has died at the age of 86 after a long illness.

Born in Poland in 1933, Penderecki studied music at Jagiellonian University and the Academy of Music in Kraków, where he went on to teach after graduation. The 1959 Warsaw Autumn Festival launched his composing career, and he soon received critical acclaim for *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima* for strings, which won the Tribune Internationale des Compositeurs UNESCO prize in 1961. Other awards included the Sibelius Gold Medal (1967), the Prix Italia (1967 and 1968) and the University of Louisville Grawemeyer Award for Music Composition in 1992.

Of his choral canon, his magnum opus was the *St Luke Passion* (1966), composed to mark 1,000 years of Christianity in Poland since the conversion in 966AD of Duke Mieszko I. Drawing its text from the Gospel of St Luke as well as other religious sources, including the *Stabat Mater*, its subject matter was potentially subversive in the context of a country still in the Eastern



AKUMSZA

Bloc and officially communist. Despite this and its modernist musical language, being mainly atonal, it resonated with the Polish public and received further performances.

In 1980, as political pressure on the communist regime became more intense, Penderecki became involved

with the newly launched Solidarity movement. Ten years earlier, anti-regime protests in Gdansk had resulted in several dozen demonstrators being killed by the police and military. A statue to commemorate them was to be erected at the shipyards, and Penderecki was commissioned to write a piece to accompany the unveiling. The composer would go on to expand his *Lacrimosa*, which was dedicated to trade union leader Lech Walensa (who went on to become the first democratically elected president of Poland), into the full-scale *Polish Requiem* (1980-84, with later revisions), with all the movements dedicated to different Polish heroes and victims.

Until the end of his life, Penderecki won numerous honours and awards, and was honorary doctor and professor of several universities. In 2017 he gained his fourth Grammy for *Penderecki conducts Penderecki vol.1* [Warner 2564603939], with the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir in a collection of his sacred music. He died at his home in Kraków on 29 March. [See archive feature, p.14].

## HAZARD CHASE CEASES TRADING

HAZARD CHASE ARTIST MANAGEMENT COMPANY has folded in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis.

As the classical music industry suffers under the global pandemic, the company chose voluntary liquidation, with assets sold to a currently unknown buyer.

In a statement, managing director James Brown said, 'I am deeply sorry to pass on this news. I would like to thank our staff, directors and shareholders, who have been wonderful colleagues. I would also like to thank all our clients – we were very proud to represent you.'

He continued, 'Everything looked so promising, but sadly, our world has been torn apart in less than a month.'



▲ Portuguese ensemble Cupertinos, one of Hazard Chase's clients

Formed in 1990 as a partnership between Brown and financial services group NW Brown and Company,

Hazard Chase's clients included Bach Collegium Japan, Cupertinos, the Gesualdo Six and Polyphony.



# LIVE IN HOPE



▲ *Mayflower in Plymouth Harbor* by William Halsall (1882): its voyage in 1620 inspired this year's festival theme

THE THREE CHOIRS FESTIVAL REMAINS OPTIMISTIC that it will still be possible to run the 2020 edition, though a note of caution has now been struck about its exact shape.

In launching its programme on 20 March, the festival expressed its determination to 'weather the storm' of the coronavirus pandemic and encouraged music lovers to book tickets with confidence. However, in a statement on 24 March chief executive Alexis Paterson said, 'Following the fresh advice issued by government on Monday 23 March, and in consultation with board members, we have today taken the decision to furlough the majority of Three Choirs Festival staff until such time as we are clearer about the possibility of holding the festival in the summer.'

'We remain optimistic that the present situation will be behind us by July but recognise that even if we are able to proceed, adjustments to the artistic and logistical planning of the festival are likely to be required and cannot presently be anticipated. To this end, we are pausing all planning until we are clearer about the form the festival may be able to take ...'

'Please be assured that we will not press ahead with the festival if there is any risk to the health and welfare of our audiences, performers or staff, and we will follow all government advice scrupulously. However, we are also concerned for all those performers and suppliers who depend on events like ours and want to do all we can to ensure their income resumes at the earliest opportunity.'

Regarding ticket sales, the festival website says, 'We would still like to encourage people to contact the box office when their designated booking dates arrive [to] help us gauge the appeal and financial viability of the festival should restrictions be lifted by the summer. However, ... we will not be asking for payment until we are certain the festival can proceed. Instead, your order will be placed on an open-ended reservation, and we will contact you to confirm the booking once the situation is clearer.'

This year's edition – due to take place from 25 July to 1 August in Worcester – would be the 293rd festival. Its central theme of journeying marks the 400th anniversary of the Mayflower's journey from England to the USA in 1620. It would be the first time that the cathedral's recently appointed director of music, Samuel Hudson (see feature, p.43), would be artistic director.

With new music always playing an important role in the festival, the announced programme features over 70 works from today's composers, including a major commission for chorus and orchestra by Gabriel Jackson, *The World Imagined*, as well as premieres of works by John Rutter, Roderick Williams, James Francis Brown and Dani Howard. *3choirs.org*.

# CALLING YOUNG SINGERS

NATIONAL YOUTH CHOIR AUDITIONS for 2020/21 are to be held digitally in May via Zoom.

Singers must be aged 18 on 31 August 2020 to age 22 on 31 August 2021 (to age 25 for current members re-auditioning).

Audition bookings close on 30 April, and the auditions themselves will be held between 10am and 4.30pm on 4, 6, 11 and 13 May. This year, because auditions will be held via Zoom, there is a reduced audition fee of £15; financial assistance is available towards the cost of auditions and membership (visit [nycgb.org.uk/financial-assistance](http://nycgb.org.uk/financial-assistance)).

The National Youth Choir is the UK's leading youth choir for singers aged 18-25. Members work with world-class musicians and coaches, and perform in high-profile national and international events.

Artistic director and principal conductor Ben Parry commented: 'Despite the regrettable cancellation of our spring season courses and concerts, we are delighted to be able to go ahead with our National Youth Choir auditions in May. We are currently devising new ways of working with our choir members to deliver a high-quality digital experience until the current situation is resolved and we can meet once again in person. We hope that as many talented young singers as possible, from all backgrounds, will book an audition, which they'll be able to do from the safety of their own home.'

■ Audition bookings can be made online at [nycgb.org.uk](http://nycgb.org.uk).

**Closing date: One week before each audition.**





## PREMIERES

[RP = REGIONAL PREMIERE]

*The following information was correct at time of going to press, but readers are strongly advised to check websites or venues.*

**Phillip Cooke: Ave Maria, mater Dei** [RP]

Khorikos/Galambos

2 May, St Anthony of Padua, New York, US

**Cheryl Frances-Hoad: Earth Puts Her Colours By**

Worcester Cathedral Choir/de la Cour

3 May, location TBC

**Luigi Cherubini: L'Hymne du Panthéon**

City of Glasgow Chorus, BBC Scottish SO/Dausgard

21 May, City Halls, Glasgow, UK

**Phillip Cooke: To the End of the Age**

Con Anima/Stollery

23 May, Monymusk Parish Church, Aberdeen, UK

**Christopher Tin: To Shiver the Sky**

USAF Band, Choral Arts Soc. of Washington/Tin

30 May, The Anthem, Washington, US

**Kim André Arnesen: Tuvayhun – Beatitude for a Wounded World**

Vox Anima/Meaders

30 May, Cadogan Hall, London, UK

**James MacMillan: Vidi aquam**

ORA Singers/Digby

31 May, Tate Modern, London, UK

**Mårten Jansson: Lincolnvisan**

**Yakov Gubanov: ...and lead them to Paradise**

Saint Louis Chamber Chorus/Barnes

31 May, Third Baptist Church, Grand Center,

St Louis, US

**Louis Andriessen: May**

Cappella Amsterdam, Orchestra of the 18th

Century/Reuss

7 Jun, International Theater, Amsterdam, NL

**Richard Allain: The Queens' Service;**

**The Queens' Responses**

Choir of Queens' College Cambridge/Allwood

7 Jun, Chapel of Queens' College, Cambridge

**Leonard Bernstein: Mass (full version)**

Chor und Orchester des Staatstheaters am

Gärtnerplatz/Dubrovsky

18 Jun, location TBC

**Elena Kats-Chernin: Human Waves**

Sydney Philharmonia Choir & Orchestra/Scott

20 Jun, Town Hall, Sydney, AU

**Harold Weiss: Darkness Project**

Projektchor Bremen/Gunther

20 Jun, Kulturkirche St Stephani, Bremen, DE

**Kim André Arnesen: Nordlys** (TBC)

World Choral Fest

21 Jun, Trondheim, NO

**James MacMillan: Be who God meant you to be**

BBC Singers/Gorton

26 Jun, St Dominic's Sixth Form College, London, UK

## CHORITALIA ALL SET TO GO AHEAD



▲ The Italian town of Montecatini Terme hosts Choritalia

A NEW SUMMER SCHOOL curated by British choral director Crispin Lewis remains in the diary for 2-9 August, in spite of the evolving coronavirus crisis.

Applications for Choritalia, a week-long choral course in Montecatini Terme, Italy, close at the end of May. The 30-40 participants will work in a chamber choir tutored by Lewis, Stephen Jackson and Deborah Miles-Johnson.

The repertoire will include a selection of Italian and English baroque music, as well as some more contemporary works from the 20th and 21st centuries. A public performance of the pieces will close the week.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic sweeping the globe, Lewis told *C&O*: 'At the time of writing we are full of determination to go ahead if the situation is safe by then, so that choral

singers have something joyous to look forward to when this has passed. To travel, sing together and to be sociable will be among the things people most long for after so much anxiety and isolation.'

While remaining positive, Lewis is realistic about the potential for change: 'Whether our Italian adventure goes ahead in August as we still intend, or whether we are forced to postpone it until later, we plan to satiate everyone's appetite for renewing their love of choral singing, travel and musical camaraderie, and to celebrate the glories of Italy after it has been so cruelly bruised.'

The cost of the course is £1,250 for participants, including full board, accommodation and tuition. **Applications close at the end of May 2020.** [choritalia.com](http://choritalia.com)

Please email items for News and Letters to the Editor for publication in future issues to [maggie.hamilton@markallengroup.com](mailto:maggie.hamilton@markallengroup.com), or post to The Editor, Choir & Organ, Mark Allen Group, St Jude's Church, Dulwich Road, London SE24 0PB, UK.



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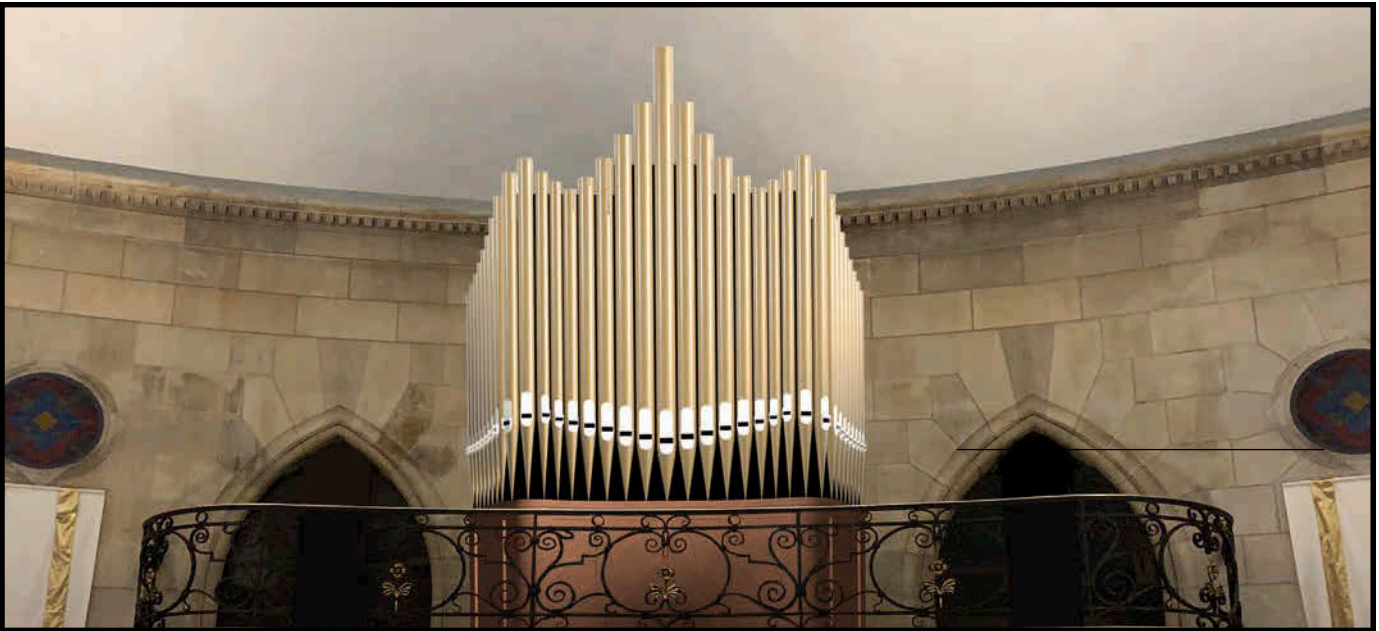
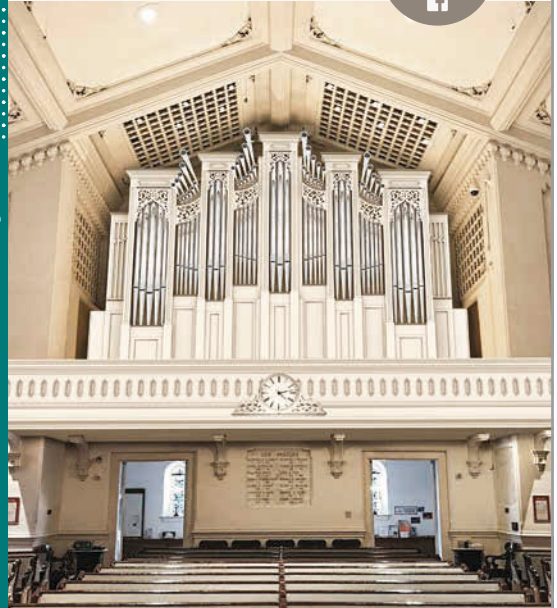


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# Odile Pierre

## 1932 – 2020

**O**dile Pierre, who died on 29 February, was the last of Dupré's great pupils, and her death marks the end of that extraordinary, historic musical line. Although little-known in England, she had one of the biggest careers of any organist of her generation, renowned not only for the spirit of her playing but for the unfussy directness of her musicianship.

She gave more than 2,000 recitals, including 12 'coast-to-coast' two-month tours of the USA, six in Asia, throughout continental Europe and Scandinavia, and countries of the 'eastern bloc' before communism fell. One of the most recorded French organists, her discography demonstrated her mastery in everything from early Italian and French classical works to Mozart, numerous Bach collections, Widor symphonies, Guilmant sonatas etc. Her CDs included the beginning of a project to record the complete Widor symphonies and various recitals. In 2002 TAHRA produced *Odile Pierre – the Clara Haskil*

with everything of Italian culture – ideally suited to her vibrant character – and played there frequently throughout her career.

Having 'discovered' Pierre in my early teens when I was in France one summer and studied with her, we corresponded regularly over more than 35 years of friendship. She served as a great example through her dedication to the organ and its art, to music, always wanting to hear, discuss and explore her pupils' ideas. It has been said that the only really successful way to teach is to embody absolutely the concentration, passion and pursuit of perfection required through demonstrated example – something Pierre did with her characteristic humour and passionate conviction. Studying with her was pure joy and an immensely happy period of development. Never imposing ideas – but always guiding, leading and stimulating – she sought always to bring out her pupils' personality rather than merely telling them what to do, encouraging them as budding artists to embrace their

## Pierre never imposed ideas, but guided and led, seeking to bring out her pupil's personality

*of the Organ*, a double-CD which included one of her unpublished RCA recordings (of French classical music), *Images* – her fascinating spoken reflections on her career, and one of the many recitals she gave at the Madeleine (January 1977), where she became organist in 1969 following the death of Jeanne Demessieux.

From an unprivileged background in a Rouen ravaged by the second world war, music was her salvation and she worked ceaselessly at it. The star pupil of Marcel Lanquetuit, she entered Dupré's class at the Paris Conservatoire at 20 (her other teachers there included Duruflé) where she won Premier Prix in various fields. But her studies with Germani in Italy that followed were a total revelation: he allowed the music to dance, to sing, to live. Pierre also fell in love

responsibilities to the truths of music rather than the meanderings of youthful escapade or wilful self-expression. Very much in tune with youth and its motivating energies, she was not one to be bound by any preconceptions of her generation.

Always delighted by my arrival with a case full of scores that I wanted to look at and hear her thoughts on, we would spend three or four hours (she taught on her delightful Kern and an older Allen in her apartment) at a time – interspersed with cups of lethal Italian espresso – engrossed in discovery and detail, breaking every so often to view and explore things away from the music by looking at art, architecture, even socio-political situations, listening to and discussing the approaches of others (not just organists). Music was never just



COURTESY PETER VAN DEN HEUVEL

▲ Odile Pierre, the last of Dupré's great pupils

a matter of playing a string of notes; what was behind them? Never once did I leave a session without a burning determination to get straight on with my work – either at the organ or studying the scores for hours.

Pierre's mastery and practical experience of all areas of repertoire was well-known and always apparent. While the protector of the great French romantic tradition, unlike many of Dupré's students she approached every other style of music with a completely different spirit, concerned only with the appropriate manner and style of each period. J.S. Bach – of whose music she made numerous recordings – remained her god throughout her career, and the purity of her performances was among the most stylistically aware of her generation.

Pierre's playing career was sadly brought to an abrupt end shortly after she retired from teaching (1992), as breast cancer made playing almost impossible. But with her characteristic force of nature, she set about studying at home the repertoire her exacting career and life (she'd combined a profession with raising two children) had not allowed time for, as well as revisiting works she'd known for years. She also turned her hand to composing, and many of her works (for organ and various chamber combinations) have now been published by Alphonse Lédur and Éditions Delatour.

I am deeply grateful for all I learned from her; she was a very great artist. ■

D'Arcy Trinkwon

# Jennifer Bate

## 1944 – 2020

British concert organist Jennifer Bate died of cancer on 25 March. Having been a friend and colleague for nearly 40 years, I was deeply saddened to hear the news.

I keenly remember the time when we first met. In 1981 I became general manager of the pioneering independent record label Unicorn-Kanchana. The label was in its prime, with an exciting and eclectic mix of artists, including Jennifer Bate.

The first time I came across Jenny as a performer was on vinyl. Listening to her recording of Messiaen's *Les corps glorieux* – especially 'Combat de la mort et de la vie', aggressive and dissonant, Christ's struggle between death and life – had a powerful effect on me. I remember my surprise on first meeting her in person: a tall, slim and graceful young woman brimming with warmth and confidence. She laughed when I told her that her performance of *Les corps glorieux* conjured up an image in my mind of someone of ferocious power with a physique to match. We quickly became friends and often went to concerts together, Jenny making sure she brought a score we could read from during the performance.

### An eager, restless scholar, she was never happier than when she uncovered new treasures

The following year came my first chance to work with Jenny, when we travelled to the Cathedral of Saint-Pierre in Beauvais, where most of her recordings of the complete Messiaen organ works had taken place. On this occasion we recorded *Virtuoso French Organ Music* and some of the organ works of César Franck. Watching Jenny at work was a revelation. She was completely focused and, although perfectly well prepared, she would take time to practise and be mentally and spiritually ready to begin recording. We worked in the evenings, when the cathedral was closed to visitors and we could record in peace. Sound engineer Bob Auger and



COURTESY ANDREW ROBERTS

▲ 'Radiant warmth and utter professionalism': Jennifer Bate

I would listen with awe as she immersed herself in the music. Nothing could penetrate that immense concentration. I remember one evening when ferocious rain and wind were in danger of disrupting the recording. Bob kept glancing anxiously at me, wondering whether we should stop. When we mentioned the storm at the end of the sessions, Jenny seemed surprised. 'Oh yes,' she said, 'I thought there was something going on, but it didn't quite register!'

I have joyful memories of Jenny's performances over the years, but one that I particularly cherish is her performance of the UK premiere of *Livre du Saint Sacrement* at Westminster Cathedral in 1986. I gave her a quick hug just before the start of the performance to wish her luck – she seemed strangely anxious, perhaps wondering whether she could do it justice. She needn't have worried. It was a triumph, and when we travelled to Paris to make the recording at the Église de la Sainte-Trinité, where Messiaen was organist for 62 years, he sat next to Jenny helping with the registrations and enjoying every moment. He seemed

happy and elated: this was his church and he had his favourite performer by his side making the premiere recording of a work which represented the summation of his compositional experience as well as his religious faith.

My chance to work with Jenny for my own label, SOMM, came in 2004. Ever the eager, restless scholar, she was never happier than when she uncovered new treasures. She was fascinated by the Wesleys and their influence on the evolution of English organ music, and her research from manuscripts and first editions resulted in our first two landmark recordings: *Organ Music by Samuel Wesley* and its companion CD, *The Wesleys and their Contemporaries*, followed swiftly by world premiere recordings of the complete works of Mendelssohn. These were the culmination of Jenny's research into the composer. We recorded on six different organs all 68 pieces, from Mendelssohn's first composition at the age of 11 to his last works. Beyond the warm reviews, what I relish most is Jenny's joy that we were able to accomplish this monumental task.

Jenny's radiant warmth, her capacity for friendship as well as her utter professionalism have enriched my life beyond measure. I feel truly blessed. ■

Siva Oke



An exclusive interview from the March/April 2008 issue of *Choir & Organ*; the complete archive is now available for subscribers to our 'digital' and 'print & digital' packages to explore (see page 18).

# Polish maverick

In the approach to the UK premiere of Krzysztof Penderecki's startlingly beautiful Symphony no.8, the composer talks to **Graeme Kay** about the transience of mankind and the immutability of nature

'**O**ld composers never die, they merely decompose.' I was reminded of this hoary *aperçu* while scanning a particularly withering review, in a Vienna newspaper, of the Austrian premiere of Krzysztof Penderecki's Symphony no.8, *Lieder der Vergänglichkeit* ('Songs of Transience'). Sparing you the original German, writer Edwin Baumgartner opined that 'the real tragedy unfolded after the interval: a by no means insignificant composer deconstructed himself'. Reading on, it seemed that Penderecki's crime was to turn his back on the avant-garde – the period of his *Threnos*, *De natura sonoris*, and *The Devils of Loudon* – in favour of producing

nostalgia.' The final insult to the sensibilities of Vienna's modern Hanslick was that the public evidently adored the work. That, of course, was because musically, the 'formerly feared composer' hadn't done anything in the street to frighten the horses.

To accuse one of the world's most celebrated and decorated composers, in effect, of selling out, of writing gobbledygook (another choice meaning of the word 'Kauderwelsch') is a grave charge, and bears some examination. It would surely be unthinkable for any composer entering his or her sixth, seventh or even eighth decade (Penderecki is 74) to go into a form of musical arrested development. While the journeys into old age of many composers –

**'You can't live without hope. And that you can interpret religiously, or as it relates to an inner world; music never speaks directly'**

music which, to that critic's ears, sounded like Wagner, Mahler, Strauss and Wolf, a 'pseudo-Romantischen Musik-Kauderwelsch' (that's musical 'gibberish'). Noting that the piece – scored for large orchestra, SAB soloists and chorus – finishes on a vanishing upwards glissando, the writer sneered that Penderecki had gone all out to appeal to both modern music fans and a public 'drunk on

Britten, Lutosławski and Elliott Carter spring immediately to mind – often seem to follow a path towards sparseness and distillation, others may choose to head in the opposite direction.

But in the case of Penderecki, our dyspeptic Viennese critic is 40 years behind the times; as long ago as in the *St Luke Passion* of 1966 – a genuine popular success – Penderecki was moving on from the kind of music which

had brought him to early prominence. After famously winning first, second and third prizes in the Polish Composers' Union Young Composers' Competition (by submitting his scores anonymously), Penderecki, then a composition teacher at the Krakow State Higher School of Music, had been spotted by the director of the Donaueschingen Contemporary Music Festival. Commissions began to flow, and Penderecki soon garnered a reputation as one of the most innovative composers of his generation, noted in his music for his extension of notational and instrumental techniques, and elastic approach to time. He was one of the first avant-gardists to experiment with sounds such as sawing wood, rustling paper, typewriters, knocking, hissing and screeching.

But the *Luke Passion*, as Polish music expert Adrian Thomas points out, 'was also the cause of disquiet among the more purist avant-garde critics for its eclecticism, which may now be seen as a portent for the polystylism which soon surfaced elsewhere.'



MAREK BIELIOT





One of the most innovative composers of his generation: Krzysztof Penderecki ▲

The other salient characteristic of Penderecki's career is his fascination with historical events and storylines, especially the traumatic. *Dies Irae* commemorates the dead of Auschwitz; *Kosmogonia* the 25th anniversary of the United Nations. *The Polish Requiem*, assembled from 1980 to 1984, weaves together Penderecki's response to events in Polish history: the uprising of the dockers in Gdansk and the establishment of the Solidarity trade union; the death of the Polish churchman Cardinal Wysinski. Here, the 'Dies Irae' sequence is Penderecki's reminder to the world of the Warsaw Uprising against the Nazi occupiers. The 'Recordare' movement was written in memory of Father Maximilian Kolbe, who sacrificed his life in Auschwitz in place of another prisoner who had a wife and children. The difficulties of writing religious music in a Communist state should not be underestimated, but there is no doubt that being prepared to compose within a framework of opposition to a disliked social and political regime ensured that Penderecki's

work would resonate with a potential mass audience. Penderecki told the American musicologist Tom Pniewski, 'My music has always been music of opposition. When we were growing up, the state wanted us to write in the then-modern Russian style, and even to use folk songs for political reasons. I was allergic to that, I'm afraid. Later, I wrote religious music – partly because it was not welcome. But I don't think of myself as a political composer, though of course I was personally involved in the turbulence of the 70s and 80s in Poland.' And commenting after the 1984 premiere of the *Polish Requiem*, Penderecki declared: 'You can't live without hope. And that you can interpret religiously, or as it relates to an inner world; music never speaks directly. I believe that for Poland too, the day for a new life will dawn, one day.'

History has proved Penderecki's words to be prophetic. And the reaction of the Vienna critic to his Symphony no.8 shows that the embrace of neo-romantic textures which has infused so much of Penderecki's music

since the *Polish Requiem* has ensured that he remains rooted in music of opposition, at least for those who remain blind (and deaf) to the tolerant aesthetic of musical eclecticism which has opened listeners' ears to such a wide range of music in the last 20 years.

Penderecki's enthusiasm for nature finds tangible expression at his home in Lustawice, where his garden boasts a labyrinth and an arboretum. 'Trees are my true passion,' he explains. 'When I am travelling, I visit tree nurseries throughout the world and bring trees with me to Poland which I plant in my arboretum, whenever the opportunity presents itself. This, he admits, provided all the motivation he needed for the Symphony no.8.

After its 2005 premiere, Penderecki added more music: 'It seemed to me that, in terms of music, the topic had not been elaborated on sufficiently. That is why I added some songs. But there is still a lot to say.' The enlarged version of the symphony now runs to 50 minutes, and comprises

►





© SCHOTT PROMOTION — PETER ANDERSON

◀ settings of lyrics by iconic German poets including Eichendorff, Goethe, Hermann Hesse, Karl Kraus, Rainer Maria Rilke and Bertolt Brecht. The themes are familiar ones concerning nature's cycle of decay and renewal, and the metaphysics of mankind's transient existence and spiritual aspirations.

'The texts are selected from German-language poetry by writers who also dealt intensively with trees, forests, plants and nature in their œuvre,' says Penderecki. 'In no other period of cultural history did the forest play such an important role as it did in the German romantic period.' Oaks, limes, chestnuts and lilacs feature in the work's catalogue of dendrology, the trees providing physical and symbolic interaction with the elements, and with the human and animal organisms which join them in populating the world. Running through the cycle is a backbone provided by stanzas from Rilke's *Ende des Herbstes* ('End of Autumn'), which signal the inevitability of change; these verses are assigned exclusively to the chorus.

At the centre of the piece is a powerful sequence of poems, including Goethe's *Sag' ich's euch, geliebte Bäume* ('Do I tell you, beloved trees'). Set for soprano and chorus, the music is fervent and dramatic as human aspiration is poured into a tree metaphor. The work's biggest climax so far is followed by the atmospheric *Im Nebel* ('In the Mist') by Hermann Hesse; to mystical music which echoes parts of Bartók's *Bluebeard's*

*Castle* and which evokes swirling, liquid intangibility, the words suggest that trees, like humans, are islands. In the forest murmurs (with magical harps and celesta) provided by Eichendorff's *Abschied* ('Farewell'), zephyrs waft through the forest as soprano and mezzo duet in a pure paean to nature. But the mood of airiness is abruptly shattered as nervous, tremolo strings introduce Hermann Hesse's *Vergänglichkeit* - the 'Transience' of the work's title. Assigning the song to soprano and chorus, Penderecki loads the short poem's eight lines, about the inevitable extinguishing of life's energies, with music of doom-laden despair.

The cycle concludes with an extended setting of Achim von Arnim's *O grüner Baum des Lebens* ('O green tree of life'), in which the chorus, soloists and orchestra are all brought together in a multi-faceted summation of the work's themes. The music begins rapturously as the mezzo and baritone evoke the metaphor of the tree of life which dwells within all of us. After a *Gurrelieder*-type mini-climax, the chorus emphatically demands, 'Show me the way through this deep snow,' and the strings embark on a brisk, fugal section which is interrupted by an apocalyptic-sounding bass trumpet: 'You could say that it is a kind of appeal to mankind to respect nature,' says Penderecki. The chorus responds with a concerted contrapuntal passage, as from a Bach oratorio, which once again invokes the tree of life before dissolving into dissonance;

soloists, chorus and solo trumpet interact in angular music, their words implying the beginning of transfiguration as death steals over the physical body and shuts down its earthly functions. Immediately, the music shifts on to a more transcendent plane as the spirit's upward journey begins, the chorus embarking on one of Penderecki's signature semitone journeys: 'I will swim in rays from this body's night, where no man can climb with the power of thought.' After a Wagnerian climax in which all the singers proclaim, 'It will cheer my senses, The world is opened to me. The spirit in God expands,' the soloists intone: 'Endless is the path!' The wordless chorus, with orchestra, embarks on a long upwards glissando: the music disappears into the void – death transfigures the corporeal human into stardust. 'Ultimately,' says Penderecki, 'the ending is intended to convey a very positive message of becoming one with nature, in death, as a form of spiritual uplift. It's a way of finding peace.' ■

*The UK premiere of Penderecki's Symphony no.8 took place on 28 February 2008 at Barbican Hall, London, performed by Heidi Grant Murphy (s), Agnieszka Rehlis (m-s), Roderick Williams (bar) and the BBC Symphony Orchestra & Chorus, conducted by Jiří Belohlávek. The first version of the symphony (2005) is available on Naxos 8.570450 and the 2008 revision, conducted by the composer, is on DUX 0901.*





## The Selby Abbey 2020 Recital Programme has been postponed to 2021 due to the coronavirus

Due to the unfolding impact of COVID-19, and in light of the Government's current advice, it is with great regret we have had to take the decision not to proceed with our 2020 Celebrity Recital Season. Our primary concern remains the safety of everyone involved – the people that make Selby Abbey function.

All of us will want to embrace the inspiration and release that live music in such a beautiful and Holy place can bring.

This extremely difficult decision will affect us all. Selby Abbey is at its heart a family – an extraordinary combination of audience, performers, clergy and staff sharing an equal passion – and we believe fervently in the strength of those bonds to sustain all of us through this time.

We believe that everyone will understand why we have had to make this very difficult decision. We send our good wishes to all our loyal supporters for a safe passage through these turbulent times. We look forward to celebrating together again in 2021, when we can enjoy the joy that music brings to us all.

We will keep our website up to date with any further information.

## Revised Recitals

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### 2021

June 8 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Benjamin Morris</b> York Minster
June 15 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Jane Parker Smith</b> London
June 22 <sup>nd</sup>	<b>Ashley Grote</b> Norwich Cathedral
June 29 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Eleni Keveitsidou</b> Athens & London
July 6 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Charles Harrison</b> Chichester Cathedral
July 13 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Aleksandr Nisse</b> The Carmelite Church Dublin
July 20 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Johannes Geffert</b> Bonn
July 27 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Martin Baker</b> London
Aug 3 <sup>rd</sup>	<b>James O'Donnell</b> Westminster Abbey
Aug 10 <sup>th</sup>	<b>The New Director of Music</b> Selby Abbey

### 2022

May 31 <sup>st</sup>	<b>The New Director of Music</b> Selby Abbey
June 7 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Timothy Ravalde</b> Chichester Cathedral
June 14 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Roger Sayer</b> The Temple Church
June 21 <sup>st</sup>	<b>Richard Elliott</b> Principal Organist The Salt Lake Tabernacle
June 28 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Colin Walsh</b> Organist Laureate Lincoln Cathedral
July 5 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Adrian Gunning</b> St John the Evangelist Islington
July 12 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Juan Paradell Solé</b> Titular Organist of the "Sistine" Musical Pontifical Chapel Choir. Vatican
July 19 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Alessandro Licata</b> Former Professor Santa Cecilia Conservatory of Music Rome
July 26 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Peter King</b> Organist Emeritus Bath Abbey

\* Retiring collection in aid of the Selby Abbey Roof Appeal

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THE 24

▲ 'Skill, dexterity, and a remarkable range of vocal colour and dynamic': York's University's chamber choir The 24

# Making it count

University is all work and no play for some, but York-based choir The 24 and their conductor Robert Hollingworth have struck a perfect balance. **Clare Stevens** sees them in action

Calling a choir 'The 24' inevitably invites comparison with a 40-year-old professional vocal ensemble whose name is a slightly smaller number. That might seem hubristic for a student group; but the buzz in the University of York's Sir Jack Lyons Concert Hall before a recent public performance by The 24 was just as enthusiastic as it would have been before an appearance by that rather more famous choir. On a damp February evening a large audience had travelled to the university campus to hear ... well, they didn't actually know what they were going to hear, as the concert was

described in the music department's season brochure as 'surprise 16th- to 20th-century choral repertoire'.

On the night it was presented as 'The 24 Playlist'; no programmes were issued, and the audience was invited to savour each piece with no idea what was coming next. *Woe is me* from the Songs of 3, 4, 5 and 6 Parts by Thomas Tomkins was followed by *Praeter rerum seriem*, Josquin des Prez's meditation on the Virgin Birth, and a setting of the *Nunc dimittis* by second-year student Oscar Ridout; a theme of death and birth, loss and love began to emerge. Gesualdo was followed by

Ligeti, Kodály by Byrd and Sheppard. Eric Whitacre's touching *i thank You God for most this amazing day* was preceded by *Come to Me in My Dreams*, an eloquent setting of a Matthew Arnold poem by the young Australian composer Joshua Adams, the first time one of his pieces has been performed in the UK. All were delivered with skill, dexterity and a remarkable range of vocal colour and dynamic; what struck me most about this young but extremely accomplished choir was that it had no single identifiable 'sound', but a chameleon-like ability to transform itself from moment to moment

►





▲ The 24's artistic director, Robert Hollingworth

◀ and piece to piece throughout a long and demanding programme.

The one work that had been announced in advance was the world premiere of *The Annunciation* by PhD student Frederick Viner, a very fine, complex setting of the 15th-century lyric 'I syng of a mayden' which had won this year's STR Music Composition Prize, awarded by ex-York composer Sean Rourke for a short unaccompanied choral piece. In his programme note Viner described it as featuring conventional characteristics

concert and introduced her piece, explaining the importance of numbers for musicians, and how they are critical to the rehearsal process, used to count time, measure melodic and rhythmic distances, and establish each part in its context.

*Numbers* found its way into the programme because The 24's conductor, Robert Hollingworth, encountered it in the summer of 2019 when he was working at Snape Maltings, Suffolk, with the National Youth Choir of Great Britain, who recorded

## 'Knowing when and when not to break the atmosphere to allow people to relax is probably an undervalued part of rehearsal technique' – Robert Hollingworth

such as a strophic form and an arch-shaped tune inspired by traditional folk-songs, 'subverted through the use of lush, extended-note chords that obscure the home key and rhapsodic soprano solos that stretch and warp the structure.'

Utterly different was another premiere: *Numbers* by Indian-American composer and vocalist Shruthi Rajasekar, a virtuosic extension of the brain-bending warm-up exercises based on counting that will be familiar to most choral singers. Currently studying as a Marshall scholar at the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester, for a Master's in composition, Rajasekar was at the

the piece but did not perform it publicly. Best known as the founder and director of the professional vocal consort I Fagiolini, Hollingworth has been based at the University of York since 2012, when he was appointed to one of the Anniversary Readerships created to mark the institution's 50th anniversary. It is a full-time post within the music department, including an administrative role with particular responsibility for careers advice; he is performance supervisor for vocal students, and lectures on choral music and singing Monteverdi, as well as leading the university's MA course in Solo Voice Ensemble Singing and directing The 24.

Hollingworth is not the choir's first director; it was founded by one of his predecessors, Roger Marsh, with John Potter (of the Hilliard Ensemble), in 2008 and more recently was conducted by Professor William Brooks. But when Hollingworth arrived, Brooks generously handed over The 24. Membership is by audition but is open to all students in the University, whatever their discipline, although in practice the majority are music students, and those who are studying other subjects sometimes experience timetable clashes. For music students, The 24's twice-weekly afternoon rehearsals count as part of their taught hours. A first-year undergraduate will be accepted if they are good enough, says Hollingworth, and the choir also includes postgraduate students, but no staff.

The 24 give three concerts a year for the University's York Concerts series, plus a few additional performances. The mixed repertoire of the concert I attended was unusual; normally there will be a focus on a particular composer or period. Hollingworth's areas of expertise and enthusiasm mean that much of what they sing is either from the 16th and 17th or from the 20th and 21st centuries. In 2018/19, for example, they performed Duarte Lôbo's six-voice Requiem of 1639, and works by Obrecht, Ockeghem, Taverner, Cornyshe, Stravinsky, Tippett, Arvo Pärt, Giles Swayne, Roderick Williams, Per Nørgård, Richard Shephard, Elizabeth Maconchy and Stacy Garrop. The choir has also sung Daniel-Lesur's highly demanding *Le cantique des cantiques* for 12 voices, from 1952, and gave the UK premiere, 60 years after it was written, of Jean Françaix's *Ode à la gastronomie*.

How does The 24 sit alongside the University's other choirs? 'Very nicely,' says Hollingworth. 'The University Choir and Chamber Choir are both directed by my colleague, Professor Peter Seymour, whose speciality is baroque music; he has his own MA course in performance practice and also directs the Yorkshire Bach Choir, which includes student singers. He is a real force in Yorkshire music-making.'

'One of Peter's primary aims with his choirs is to ensure that students have the chance to perform as many as possible of the great cornerstones of choral repertoire during their time in York: the Bach Passions, the B minor

Mass, and a handful of the big oratorios. I do a similar thing with The 24 but from different centuries, giving each generation of students the chance to sing some really canonic works. Josquin's *Praeter rerum seriem* in our spring concert is one of those, for instance; it's an extraordinary latticework, extraordinarily well crafted.'

A bonus for York students is the opportunity to work with Hollingworth's colleagues from I Fagiolini, both when they visit the University to coach singers and the vocal consort MA course, and in performance. For example, in November 2016 The 24 joined I Fagiolini on their Decca recording *Monteverdi – the Other Vespers* and the following year they travelled to Florence with their professional mentors to perform Striggio's 40-part Mass, one to a part. They also opened the 2017 York Early Music Festival with a surround-sound 'walk-through' performance of the Monteverdi Vespers.

Choir members benefit from Hollingworth's own long experience as a professional singer. Rehearsals are full of anecdotes and advice, laced with his inimitable sense of the ridiculous. He expects his singers to work hard – 'it is an intense process, working on tiny details such as the exact position of the tongue for a particular French vowel, you should feel tired afterwards, both mentally and physically' – but humour is important, he says, both in creating a relaxed but also a focused atmosphere.

'I probably have a bit of a reputation for my jokes, but I think anyone eavesdropping on a session (whether of The 24 or I Fagiolini)

would actually be amazed at the sheer non-stop hard work that goes on. It took me a long time to realise that humour doesn't equal flippancy but can in fact help with concentration. You're asking people to focus on incredibly fine details of acoustically pure intonation or points of foreign pronunciation or the subtleties of consonant textures (we do quite a bit of work on text without harmony). Knowing when and when not to break the atmosphere to allow people to relax – or to relieve a tense situation – is probably an undervalued part of rehearsal technique.

'It's also important to acknowledge the audience – they've paid to be here, after all, so it's our job to make sure they enjoy themselves. So the last thing I say to the choir before they walk on is, "Give the audience a smile." I try to get them to look out beyond me during the performance too; I want them to watch, of course, and to be aware of me, but their job is to connect with the audience. We try to get some of the music off by heart, even though it's so difficult, just so that we can communicate better with the audience and with one another.

'They arrive with quite a range of sight-reading ability – some are very good, others need to keep working at it. We encourage this because it really does help with learning if you can read and understand the whole score, not just learn your own part. But on the other hand, students now arriving have skills and an awareness of other types of music that I didn't have at their age.'

Most of the choir members have one-to-one singing lessons with either Yvonne Seymour, Alex Ashworth or Susan Young, who has recently started teaching a new MA

in Vocal Studies at the University. 'Susan is a magician,' says Hollingworth. 'She is fastidious about technique but she also understands that sometimes imagination and metaphor are what is needed to produce a particular sound or overcome a technical hurdle. She sometimes comes to rehearsals to help us tackle a difficult score, or she will take the sopranos off to work on a challenging phrase.'

Young says she really enjoys this troubleshooting role, and pays tribute to Hollingworth's collaborative style of working: 'The interesting thing about Robert is that he has very clear ideas and concepts, yet he also invites and really listens to other views and opinions. I feel comfortable discussing creative ideas in front of the choir, so they can see that process happening.'

Graduates of The 24 can be found in disproportionate numbers in ensembles such as Genesis Sixteen (The Sixteen's choral training programme for young professionals) and the National Youth Choir of Great Britain's Fellowship scheme. This is no accident, says Alex Ashworth: 'You can see the change in the students of this department over their time here. Robert likes quite free and expressive singing, which is good for their voices; and they learn to find their own solutions to challenges and become independent singers and thinkers and characterful performers. They are ready to take their place on the professional stage.' ■  
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Clare Stevens works as a writer, editor and publicist in the Welsh Marches, where she sings with Hereford Choral Society.









# Willis revived

Sir Frederick Ouseley once described it as 'the finest church organ in the world'. **Paul Hale** describes the latest work carried out by Harrison & Harrison at Salisbury Cathedral

**T**here have been two famous four-manual organs in Salisbury Cathedral, the renown of the first having been somewhat eclipsed by the fame of the second.

In 1710, Renatus Harris (c.1652-1724), then at the peak of his creative powers, installed on the quire screen at Salisbury the most advanced instrument then known in these lands. In a sumptuous case, where the ornamental woodwork above the central tower was equal to the height of the tower itself, Harris created an instrument with a Great, Borrowed Great, Choir and Echo. The Great and Choir manuals had 50 notes, the Echo 25. Using his system of 'communication' within the soundboard, Harris was able to 'borrow' a second Great from the first, so that each stop could be used, quite independently, on two keyboards.

The synoptic stop-list was:

**Great** 8.8.8.4.4.2<sup>2</sup>/3.2.1<sup>3</sup>/5.1<sup>1</sup>/3.IV.V.8.8.8.4

**Choir** 8.8.4.4.2<sup>2</sup>/3.2.8

**Echo** 8.8.4.4.2<sup>2</sup>/3.2.1<sup>3</sup>/5.1<sup>1</sup>/3.8.8.8

**Drum pedal** tuned to 8ft C

*The Borrowed Great was the same as the Great, though with only one of the two 8ft Open Diapasons.*

The extraordinary abundance of mutations and reed stops (four reeds on the Great and three on the Echo is remarkable) shows at a glance the dominant influence on Renatus Harris of the classical French organ, an influence which reached him through his father Thomas, and grandfather Robert Dallam.

That this organ was not only spectacular but well-made is evident from the fact that it was little altered (though regularly repaired) for the next 80 years – quite remarkable for a British organ at any period in our history.

Indeed, it would have lasted longer and the case might even have still been in existence had the cathedral itself not been 'restored' by James Wyatt in 1789-92. In 1788 the Bishop of Salisbury had prevailed upon George III to present the cathedral with a new organ once restorations were complete. Samuel Green, who held the Royal Warrant and – after the death in 1785 of Johannes Snetzler – was probably the best-known organ builder in Britain at the time, provided a 23-stop three-manual instrument in 1792 in casework which drew much criticism – as did Wyatt's 'Gothic' screen on which it stood. In 1877 the Green instrument was given to St Thomas's

## Willis provided the organ with as complete a stop-list as any cathedral organ could reasonably expect to have at that period

Church, a mere 600 yards away, where much of it remains to this day – including the somewhat mutilated case – and is currently under restoration.

The advent of the cathedral's second four-manual organ heralded the removal of the Green instrument. At this point, Green's 23 gently blown, sweetly singing ranks were replaced by the greatest possible contrast – 55 stops voiced in the powerful style of Father Henry Willis, mounted either side of the choir stalls with minimal casework. The shock to listeners must have been enormous – and not all would have approved, for there is correspondence in several places where a Willis replaced a Green (such as at Wells Cathedral a few years earlier, and New College, Oxford, a few years later) that the advent of the distinctly 'heroic' sound of a Willis at the expense of the sweeter, more beguiling 'Old English' sounds of our 18th- and early 19th-century instruments was not to everyone's taste.

However, the Willis sound soon came to prevail in cathedrals up and down the land, with Salisbury, Durham, St Paul's, Truro and Hereford becoming the most renowned. Today, that is still the case. Indeed, it is little short of a miracle that three of these organs survive almost unaltered, and that the other two retain a strong Willis character. Whereas Truro is the least altered, Salisbury has the advantage over it of being considerably larger, and thus far more rich in 'colours'. Hereford shares that richness but lacks the perfect internal balance of Salisbury, as its Swell and Solo are so recessed. Durham became a Harrison and St Paul's a Mander, so in the

view of many, Salisbury is top of the tree. Indeed, Sir John Stainer is on record as saying that it surpassed his Willis at St Paul's, and Sir Frederick Ouseley wrote to the cathedral's organist that 'I honestly believe that you have the finest church organ in the world – certainly the best in England.'

Willis provided the organ with as complete a stop-list as any cathedral organ could reasonably expect to have at that period. The instrument even boasted pneumatic thumb pistons to each manual. All his signature stops were specified; indeed, he somewhat ran out of flute varieties, as there are four lieblich and six harmonic flutes at various pitches. Willis appeared not to be constricted by the lack of space afforded by having to fit the organ in to a single bay on either side of the quire, with as little projection as possible into the side aisles. The only – inevitable – trespass on a further part of the building was his unapologetic parking of the two 32ft stops against the east wall of the north transept, ►

◄ The twin cases of Salisbury Cathedral's Father Willis



## Salisbury Cathedral

HENRY WILLIS (1876); HENRY WILLIS &amp; SONS (1934); HARRISON &amp; HARRISON (1978/1993/2020)

**GREAT**

1. Double Open Diapason	16
2. Open Diapason no.1	8
3. Open Diapason no.2	8
4. Claribel Flute	8
5. Stopped Diapason	8
6. Principal no.1	4
7. Principal no.2 (1934)	4
8. Flûte Couverte (1934, was Great Piccolo)	4
9. Twelfth	2 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub>
10. Fifteenth	2
11. Mixture (15.17.19.22)	IV
12. Trombone	16
13. Trumpet	8
14. Clarion	4

**SWELL**

15. Contra Gamba	16
16. Open Diapason	8
17. Lieblich Gedackt	8
18. Viola da Gamba	8
19. Vox Angelica	8
20. Octave	4
21. Flûte Harmonique	4
22. Super Octave	2
23. Mixture (15.17.19)	III
24. Hautboy	8
25. Vox Humana	8
26. Contra Fagotto	16
27. Trompette (renamed 1934, was Cornopean)	8
28. Clarion <i>Tremolo</i>	4

**CHOIR**

29. Lieblich Gedackt	16
30. Open Diapason (1934)	8
31. Flûte Harmonique	8
32. Lieblich Gedackt	8
33. Salicional	8
34. Gemshorn	4
35. Flûte Harmonique	4
36. Lieblich Gedackt	4
37. Nazard (1934)	2 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub>
38. Flageolet	2
39. Tierce (1934)	1 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>5</sub>
40. Trumpet (1934) <i>Tremolo</i> (1934)	8

**SOLO**

(41-47 enclosed)

41. Violoncello (1934)	8
42. 'Cello Célestes (1934)	8
43. Flûte Harmonique	8
44. Flûte Harmonique	4
45. Cor Anglais (was on Choir at 8ft)	16
46. Clarinet (renamed 1934)	8
47. Orchestral Oboe <i>Tremolo</i> (1934)	8
48. Tuba	8
49. Tuba Clarion	4

**PEDAL**

50. Double Open Diapason (metal)	32
51. Open Bass (wood)	16
52. Open Diapason no.1 (extension of 50, 1934)	16
53. Open Diapason no.2	16
54. Violone	16
55. Bourdon	16
56. Lieblich Gedackt (from 29, 1934)	16
57. Octave	8
58. Viola (extension of 54, 1934)	8
59. Flute	8
60. Super Octave (2020)	4
61. Octave Flute (1934, was Great 4ft)	4
62. Mixture (12.15.19.22)	IV
63. Contra Posaune (wood)	32
64. Ophicleide	16
65. Clarion	8

Usual Willis III couplers.

Wind pressures: 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>" to 18<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>"

▼ In the restoration, Harrison &amp; Harrison have given the console new electro-pneumatic actions





COURTESY HARRISON &amp; HARRISON



COURTESY HARRISON &amp; HARRISON

▲ Work included (l) restoring ebony caps to the pedal sharps, to the Willis pattern; a central task (r) was releathering many of the reservoirs

◀ with the blowing equipment room on the other side of the wall, outside the building. Such a thing would never be allowed now – but thank heavens it was then, when aspiration and creativity outweighed issues of conservation and the current unwillingness to change the appearance of anything old in our cathedrals.

By 1934 the Willis organ was in need of a major overhaul. Unsurprisingly, Henry Willis III wished to convert the action to electro-pneumatic and install one of the company's up-to-date, Skinner-inspired consoles, bristling with more clever and useful devices than the consoles of any other British firm. The organist at the time, Sir Walter Alcock, was content to go along with this (after all, Willis had been refining and fitting such consoles and actions from the mid-1920s and they had reached a peak of perfection and reliability), but was determined that his wonderful Father Willis reed pipes would remain unaltered. This was quite a challenge, as Henry III was distinctly inclined to gild the lily and 'improve' his grandfather's voicing wherever he could – he boasts as much in the short-lived Willis house journal, *The Rotunda*. It has been believed until very recently that the reeds were indeed left unaltered – but cunning are the ways of reed voicers, and as we will shortly see, they, or voicers at a later date, left their mark, invisible until now.

Willis made several oft-applied tonal changes when it came to rebuilding his grandfather's organs, several of which he carried out here. One was to turn the Great 4ft Flûte Harmonique into a Flûte Couverte (by cutting down the pipes and fitting stoppers), which he varied here by transposing and stoppering the 1876 Great Piccolo, removing the 4ft Flûte Harmonique to the Pedal. Another was to add a second Great 4ft Principal, which here replaced the Piccolo. A third was to add Choir mutations of small scale and delicate tone – a stopped Nazard and open Tierce (as were found in Ernest Skinner's Choir Organs in the USA). A fourth was to add his broad-toned Solo strings and to replace a duplicate Clarinet or Corno di Bassetto (here on the Choir Organ) with 'more useful' stops. The often largely unenclosed Solo organs were enclosed (except for the Tubas), and development of the Pedal took place, often by extending lower-pitched ranks higher and sometimes by borrowing manual doubles. All this can be seen at Salisbury and remains in place today, with but one alteration, to be explained shortly.

In 1968 Watkins & Watson installed new blowers and a cleaning took place in 1969, with new whiffle-tree swell engines replacing the clever 1934 'Infinite Speed and Gradation' machines (still to be found – hurrah – at Liverpool Cathedral). From 1971-78 Noel

Mander's firm looked after the organ, until a restoration, some releathering, console revisions and an electrical upgrading by Harrison & Harrison in 1978.

And so the organ remained until 2019, by when it became abundantly apparent that further work was required, in particular to the complex and many-pressured wind system, which was in need not only of releathering but also of reorganising, especially on the north side, where its convolutions defied logic – or even analysis. Harrison & Harrison carried out the work during 2019 and 2020, when the following tasks were completed:

- ▶ All pipes cleaned, the original cone tuning for the metal flues being retained.
- ▶ All reservoirs, concussions and swell engines releathered, rationalising the wind system on the north side, with fewer reservoirs and internal wind control valves.
- ▶ New wind trunking where needed, with additional concussions to improve wind stability, particularly on the Solo.
- ▶ Swell shutter whiffle-tree machines replaced with modern electric equivalents.
- ▶ New internal actions to all soundboards, replacing 1934 external action conversions.
- ▶ Various pedal unit chests and front pipe chests – complex and altered 1876/1934 actions replaced with electro-pneumatic actions.

▶



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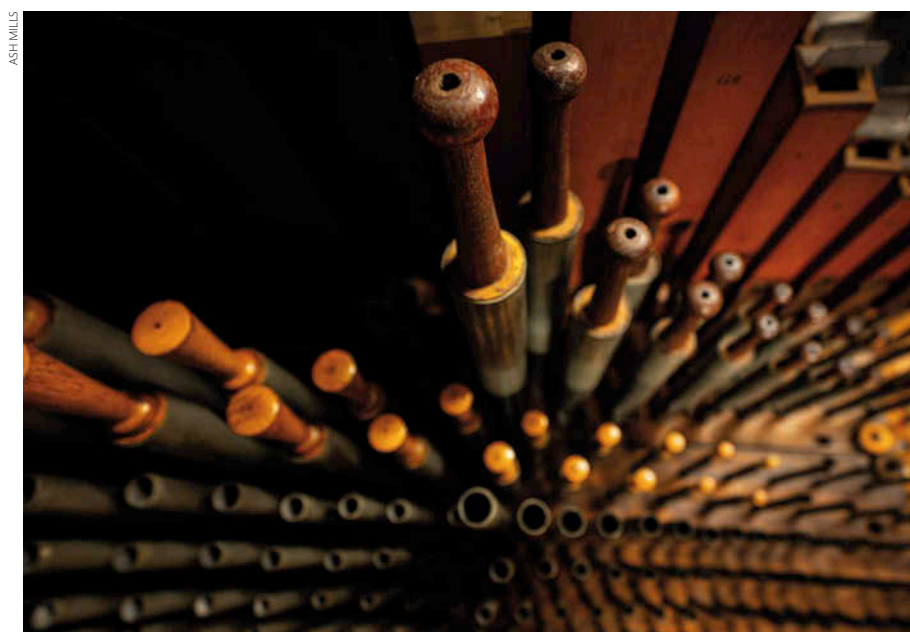
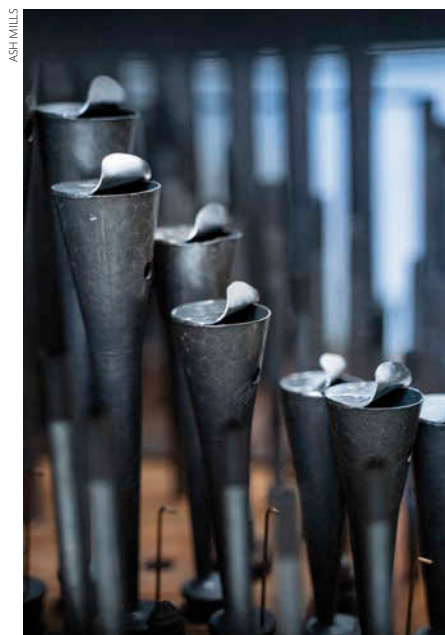


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▲ (clockwise, from top left) Swell Hautboy pipes; pipe repairs under way; typical Father Willis 'tulip' stoppers behind the upperwork

- ▶ Manual keyboards restored with gaps between sharps slightly increased.
- ▶ Pedalboard restored, the previously plain sharps capped with ebony in the Willis manner.
- ▶ New key and pedal contacts fitted.
- ▶ New solid-state coupler system.
- ▶ Improved safe access to several areas, Solo and Tubas in particular.

In addition, one modest tonal weakness was addressed. In 1934, in an attempt to

provide more of a Pedal chorus, Henry Willis III added two octaves of treble pipes to the Pedal Violone, making them available as an 8ft Viola (which proved very useful) and a 4ft Octave Viola (which proved of very little use). The Octave Viola was very much softer than the powerful 8ft Octave and Mixture IV, so failed to act as a bridge between them, or to 'lead up' to adding the Mixture. In the recent work, the Octave Viola extension has been replaced by an independent Father Willis-type 4ft Super Octave, placed on a new

slider soundboard which also contains the Bourdon, Flute, Octave Flute (previously on a 1934 unit chest) and Mixture. This replaces a less satisfactory slider soundboard and is situated on the north side where the original Father Willis console stood.

When cleaning the reeds, it was discovered – to the considerable surprise of Harrison's voicers – that at some stage a voicer or tuner had altered the Great 16.8.4 reeds and Tubas by introducing felt within the resonators – cunningly gluing it out of sight! This was removed and the pipes immediately regained their original freshness. In 1934 Willis had revoiced the Choir Cor Anglais for the Solo (where the pressure was higher), transposing it to 16ft pitch and doubtless trying to modify it towards the beautiful 1920s Ernest Skinner pattern of Cor Anglais which, among many other Skinner stops such as the Waldhorn, French Horn and Erzähler (called by Willis 'Sylvestrina'), had inspired Henry III on his 1920s visits to the USA. The result was a very uneven stop, during its compass changing tone several times; neither did the pipes remain in tune. With the voicing now corrected back to what one would expect of a Father Willis stop, in the words of Duncan Mathews (the H&H production director responsible for the restoration), it 'now sounds like one stop'.

The organ came back into full use at the start of Lent this year. It can now look forward to a further extended period of glorious service, retaining its golden reputation at the pinnacle of Father Willis's ever-inspiring cathedral organs. ■

*Due to the coronavirus, Salisbury Cathedral's new Organ Festival to mark the restoration of the Willis/Harrison & Harrison organ will be launched on 13 May with a digital recital given by the home team; the originally planned concert, of David Briggs performing his transcription of Mahler's Symphony no.2, will now take place on 23 September. The monthly Sunday Organ Music will also go digital, with mini recitals on 26 April (Sam Bristow), 17 May (John Challenger), and 7 June (David Halls). Further details can be found at [bit.ly/39g09H7](http://bit.ly/39g09H7).*

*Paul Hale has been writing about the organ and acting as a consultant (including at Salisbury) since the 1970s, while being a cathedral organist and recitalist.*

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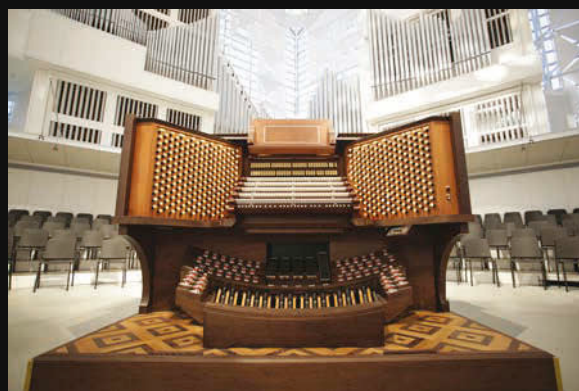
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# Life after forty

When *Spem in alium* was composed, no one could have imagined that it would one day be performed by 40 cellos, or spark so many other choral works in 40 parts.

**Rebecca Tavener** traces the enduring influence of Thomas Tallis's famous motet

When Alessandro Striggio visited London in 1567, he wowed musical society with his motet for 40 voices, *Ecce beatam lucem*, first performed in 1561 in Florence to the astonishment of visiting Papal envoys. It is no wonder that, for the sake of national honour, Thomas Howard, the Catholic 4th Duke of Norfolk, should lay down a challenge, asking, according to Thomas Wateridge (writing and probably embroidering the

tale in 1611) ...

... whether none of our Englishmen could sett as good a song, & Tallice being very skillfull was felt to try whether he could undertake the Matter, which he did ... which was songe in the longe gallery at Arundel House which so farre surpassed the other that the Duke hearing of it songe tooke his chayne of Gold from his necke & putt it about Tallice his necke & gave it him.





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The most likely date of the premiere of Tallis's *Spem in alium* is 1570, making 2020 the 450th anniversary; but other theories of its inception are available, including the idea that it might have been a tribute to Elizabeth I on her 40th birthday in 1573. It may perhaps have been an earlier work, unrelated to Striggio's visit, composed for the 3rd Duke of Norfolk, owner of Nonsuch Palace (the other potential location of the premiere) in the 1550s. If so, Queen Mary's 40th birthday in 1556 is another contender. The text from the deuterocanonical Book of Judith, telling of the Jewish heroine's seduction and slaying of the tyrannical Assyrian general Holofernes, might fit with Bloody Mary's execution of the Duke of Northumberland, who had attempted to supplant her with Lady Jane Grey.

Royal connections continued in 1612 with the singing of *Spem* in an English contrafactum – 'Sing and glorify' – at the massive funeral of Henry Frederick, Prince of Wales. Some suggest that an English text was required because the Judith story was inappropriate, but the likely reason is that the 18-year-old, hugely

popular prince was a staunch defender of the Protestant cause (if he had lived there might have been no English civil war) who would have much preferred this upbeat English text.

Whatever the truth, the Howards remain proud of the commission to this day. For Henry Howard, 10 times great-grandson of the 4th Duke whom he 'stoutly maintains' was the commissioner, it has loomed large (how else?) in family events, beginning with his wedding and the birth of his first child. Let's read about it in his own words:

It was at St Mary's (Episcopal Cathedral, Edinburgh) in 2005: we walked out to it, rather than a boring old organ voluntary. We invited about 55 people from the choir and congregation to sing, so not quite 1-to-a-part. They had an hour to rehearse it, and David Allinson very gamely agreed to conduct. It went off, so far as I could tell, without a hitch. We then 'performed' it again at the wedding reception at about 9pm, after the champagne had been flowing for many hours.

▲ Tallis's *Spem in alium* has inspired a variety of interpretations, including a 2017 Royal Northern College of Music performance for 40 cellos

▷



► (l) Painting (1563) by Hans Eworth of the 4th Duke of Norfolk, who challenged Thomas Tallis (r) to write a piece to match Striggio's 40-part motet

► (opposite page, top) Sir James MacMillan was commissioned to write the 40-part *Vidi aquam* as a foil to Tallis's motet: 'As I settled with the task, I became engrossed in the challenge'

► (opposite page, below) Other composers who have been inspired to write complementary pieces to *Spem in alium* include (clockwise, from top left) Alec Roth, Gabriel Jackson, Giles Swayne, Peter McGarr, Michael Zev Gordon and Jaako Mäntyjärvi



◄ (Musical B&B guests visiting Henry's ancestral pile of Johnby Hall in Cumbria might want to persuade him to play them the not-for-public-consumption recording.) But the story didn't stop there:

Nicholas was born by caesarian section, and the surgeon suggested Anna should have some music playing during the operation. She chose *Spem in alium*, so he was born to the sound of it.

It is now musicological old hat to propose that the first sing-through of *Spem* may also have been a play-through. One might imagine Tallis assembling 40 ad hoc musicians, assorted singers and players (organ, virginals, viols, recorders, lute, sackbuts and cornets etc.) before setting his great score in

conducted Bull to a Vestry, or Music School joyning to the Cathedral, and shew'd to him a Lesson or Song of forty parts, and then made a vaunting Challenge to any Person in the World to add one more part to them, supposing it to be compleat and full, that it was impossible for any mortal Man to correct, or add to it. Bull thereupon desiring the use of Ink and ru'd Paper, (such as we call Musical Paper), prayed the Musician to lock him up in the said School for 2 or 3 hours; which being done, not without great disdain by the Musician, Bull in that time or less, added forty more parts to the said Lesson or Song. The Musician thereupon being called in, he view'd it, tried it, and retr'y'd it. At length he burst into a great ecstasy, and swore by the great God that he that added those 40 parts, must either be the Devil or Dr Bull&c. Whereupon Bull making himself known, the Musician fell down and adored him.

## Victorian reviewers derided it as 'too trashy for endurance' and the 'mistake of a barbarous age'

motion. Some years ago, with the intention of touring Robert Carver's *Missa Dum sacrum mysterium* with ten solo voices, I decided to recruit choirs and instrumentalists in each Scottish venue to field another 30 parts for *Spem*. Having denuded all the music hire libraries in the UK of copies so that chamber and cathedral choirs might rehearse, we travelled in a hope which was amply rewarded with fascinatingly contrasted interpretations, a personal favourite being the Aberdeen version with choirs of wind and brass joining the voices.

*Spem* has accrued legends as a great ship collects barnacles. In 1982 Denis Stevens revealed an anecdote in which John Bull travelled to northern France in 1601. There he met a 'famous Musician' who

The Victorians knew *Spem*: in February 1878 the Revd H. Fleetwood Shepherd wrote a letter to the editor of the *Musical Times* containing the 1611 account of the circumstances surrounding the composition and first performance of *Spem*. The work had already been revived in 1836 by the Madrigal Society and given several subsequent performances, including one with 500 voices in 1845, sung to sol-fa syllables. Reviewers derided it as 'too trashy for endurance' and the 'mistake of a barbarous age'. In 2006 the BBC Singers organised a performance with 700 singers which one trusts was received with greater enthusiasm. There have been performances without any voices: in 2017 the Royal Northern College of Music created a version with 40 cellos and in 2008 the cellist Peter Gregson

multi-tracked *Spem*, performing all the parts on one instrument.

For today's choral composers, *Spem* is both inspiration and challenge, and commissions have not been lacking. A recent list includes Gabriel Jackson's *Sanctum est verum lumen*, Alec Roth's *Earthrise*, Giles Swayne's *The Silent Land*, Robert Hanson's *And There Shall Be No Night There*, Jaako Mäntyjärvi's *Tentatio*, and Peter McGarr's *Love You Big as the Sky*. Michael Zev Gordon's hymn to the genome, *Allele*, attempted to turn DNA into music, using *Spem* as a model. The common linguistic root of 'alium' and 'allele' (the other) makes the title a beautiful conceit.

James MacMillan's *Vidi aquam* in 40 parts was commissioned by ORA Singers as a foil to *Spem*. He was daunted: 'To begin with I was terrified. In fact, I had hoped that they weren't serious about the 40-part bit to begin with! Nevertheless, as I settled to the task I became engrossed with the challenge. As I got into it, it mesmerised me, and it felt good, day after day working steadily at the intricate and complex detail. It felt like knitting – not that I know what that feels like! I felt bereft when it was finished. There is no direct connection with the text of *Spem*. I was looking for a compact little text that would give me the scope to let the music expand by itself, so I just fell back on Latin liturgical texts that I remembered and had sung in plainsong in the past.' When asked if he knew about the probable involvement of choirs of instruments in the premiere and whether



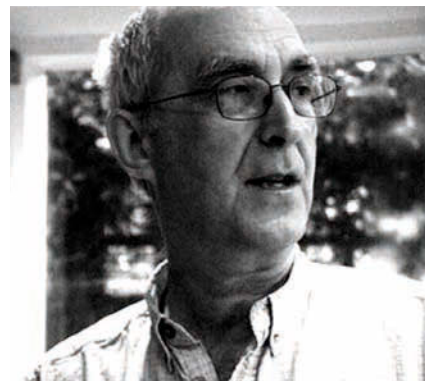
ADRIAN MYERS



SALLY CORRICK



JOEL GARTHWAITE



JANABILLIS

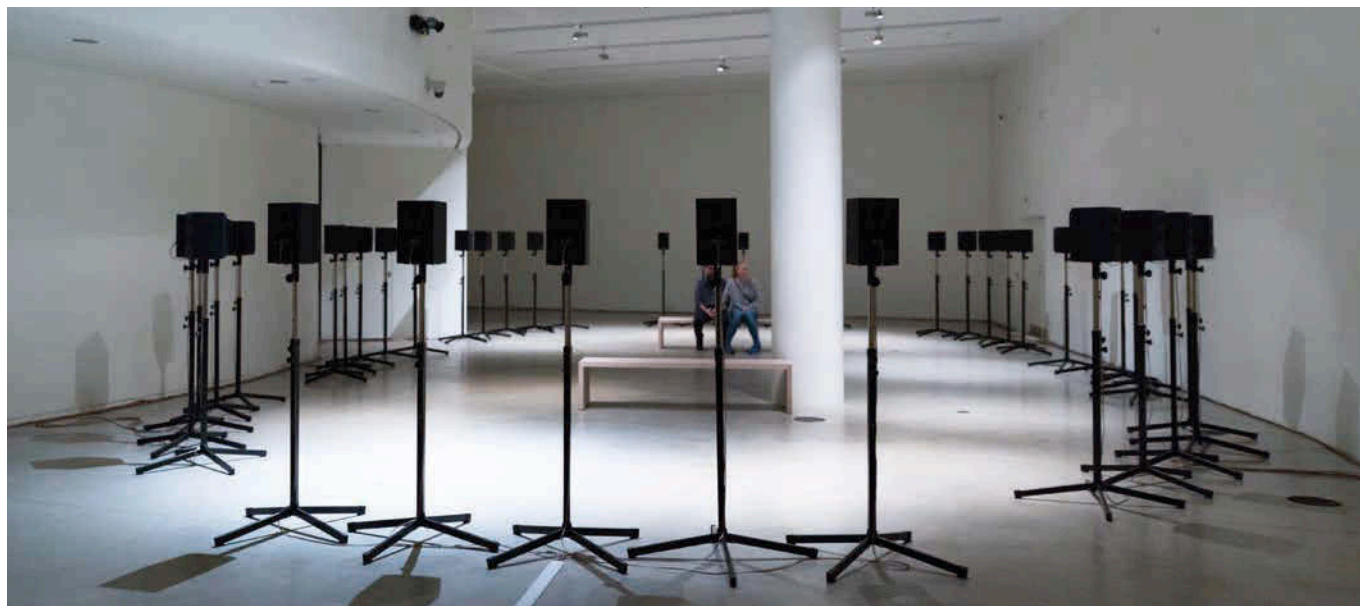


CLAIRE SHOVETON



JOHN GUY





VILLY FINN ISAKSEN

▲ *The Forty Part Motet*, a sound installation by Canadian artist Janet Cardiff

◁ he had considered that as an option, he replied, 'I hadn't thought of that, but I will now!'

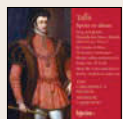
Mention of Lady Jane Grey earlier may have reminded you that *Fifty Shades of Grey* by E.L. James features a performance of *Spem* by the Tallis Scholars (sales of their recording rocketed). Was the author thinking about the Judith story? This irresistibly conjures an image of the lustful Holofernes, desperately choking out his 'safe word' while, literally, losing his head. But, seriously, maybe the last word should belong to the visual art critic of the *New York Times* on visiting Canadian artist Janet Cardiff's sound installation *The*

*Forty Part Motet*, with 40 loudspeakers featuring the individual voices of members of the Choir of Salisbury Cathedral singing *Spem*. Placed in The Cloisters in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, it could be heard all around the building, from near or far, subliminally colouring the entire experience for visitors: 'The sound, from invisible people, as if from ghosts, feels like charged, living sculpture ...' ■

*Rebecca Tavener is a singer and director specialising in early and contemporary music. She is founder-director of Canty, Scotland's only professional medieval music group.*

## RECORDINGS

In this work so notoriously hard to capture, the best interpretations are those wherein the singers get excited but don't compete. Here are three contrasted favourites:



For an exciting 'total voice' experience:

### Tallis: *Spem in alium*

The Cardinal's Musick / Andrew Carwood (dir)  
[Hyperion CDA 68156]



For a wondrously ethereal live performance:

### 40 Voices

Huelgas Ensemble / Paul van Nevel (dir)  
[Harmonia mundi HMC 801954]



For the premiere recording of a voice and instrument interpretation:

### Striggio: *Missa Ecco si beato giorno*

I Fagiolini / Robert Hollingworth (dir)

[Decca 478 2734, complete with accompanying DVD]

There's also a rather beautiful (for those not blessed with or cursed by synaesthesia) animated graphical score accompanying a venerable performance from the Taverner Choir on YouTube: [bit.ly/335BovL](http://bit.ly/335BovL)

▼ The Cardinal's Musick provide a 'total voice' experience



VILLY FINN ISAKSEN

# Ever wondered what an organ concert sounds like in Freemasons' Hall?



**D'Arcy Trinkwon**  
*International Concert Organist*  
**10<sup>th</sup> June 2020**  
**6.15pm**

**Nigel Ogden**  
*International Theatre Organist*  
**11<sup>th</sup> November 2020**  
**6.15pm**



In 2017, the United Grand Lodge of England celebrated the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the world's first Grand Lodge, here in London, in 1717. Part of the preparation for the celebration was the overhaul and enhancement of the 1933 Willis III organ in Freemasons' Hall, Covent Garden and the set-up of a series of FREE, public organ concerts. Both for 2020 are shown above.

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# A flourishing business

In the second part of his survey of the work of Gray & Davison, **Nicholas Thistlethwaite** traces the company's ascendancy to become one of the UK's leading 19th-century organ builders

## part 2 Building a business

Last month, we focused on the work of Gray & Davison in the firm's Victorian heyday when Frederick Davison pioneered the construction of large concert organs, and modernised production methods and business practices. However, the firm already had an established reputation as one of the leading metropolitan organ builders when Davison became John Gray's junior partner in 1841. Here, we consider how that reputation had come about, and describe the development of the firm under the management of two generations of the Gray family.

It was in 1772 that Robert Gray established his workshop in Leigh Street, Holborn, and commenced business as an organ builder. There were other instrument makers in the network of streets between High Holborn and Red Lion Square to the north, and like some of these neighbours, Gray initially made harpsichords and pianofortes as well as pipe organs.

Nothing is known for certain of Gray's antecedents. The register recording his burial in 1796 states that he was 54 years old, which implies that he was born in 1741 or 1742. An early source claimed that Robert had been apprenticed to John Crang, but there are other possibilities.<sup>1</sup> The 1770s was a period of change in London's organ building craft, with newcomers such as John Lincoln, Samuel Green and Hugh Russell establishing their own workshops, and the older generation, including Thomas Parker, George England

and John Crang, either retiring or dying. It was therefore a good time for an ambitious young man to set up his own business.

Three chamber organs survive from the 1770s. The first, now at Dingestow Court near Monmouth, was a reconstruction of an instrument 'by that celebrated artist commonly called Father Smith, and erected in its present form by Robert Gray of London 1775.'<sup>2</sup> No doubt most of Gray's early projects were on a similarly modest scale. However, the business received a critical injection of energy a few years later when Robert's younger brother, William, joined him. Born in the mid-1750s, he had probably trained in another workshop, but by 1784 he and Robert were partners, advertising themselves as 'Organ, Harpsichord & Piano Forte Makers.' Briefly, they rented additional premises at 72 Queen Anne Street East in the west end, perhaps as a showroom in a fashionable quarter of the town, but in 1786 this address

and Leigh Street were given up; the two households and the workshop moved to the north side of the New Road (later Euston Road), a little to the west of the junction with Tottenham Court Road and Hampstead Road. The business was to remain on this site until 1890.

From there, the brothers began to secure church work in London, including a new organ for St Anne and St Agnes in Gresham Street (1782), and repairs at St Bride's, Fleet Street (1784). Their first cathedral contract followed at Gloucester in 1790. Elsewhere, a connection with a local clergyman in Shropshire brought several contracts (including St Chad's and St Julian's, Shrewsbury, both in 1792), while the building of their first three-manual instrument for Holy Trinity, Clapham (1794) forged a connection with Anglican Evangelicals which led to several major commissions in London and the north of England over the next few years. ▶

### St Chad's, Shrewsbury (1792)

#### GREAT

(GG-f3)

Open Diapason	8
Stopped Diapason	8
Principal	4
Twelfth	2 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub>
Fifteenth	2
Sesquialtra	III
Mixture	II
Trumpet	8
Cornet (c1?)	IV

#### SWELL ORGAN

(f-f3)

Choir bass (GG-e) with Stopped Diapason	
8 and Flute 4	
Open Diapason	8
Stopped Diapason	8
Principal	4
Trumpet	8
Hautboy	8

*Shifting movement*

◀ Dingestow Court, Monmouth: Robert Gray chamber organ, 1775, including pipework by 'Father' Smith



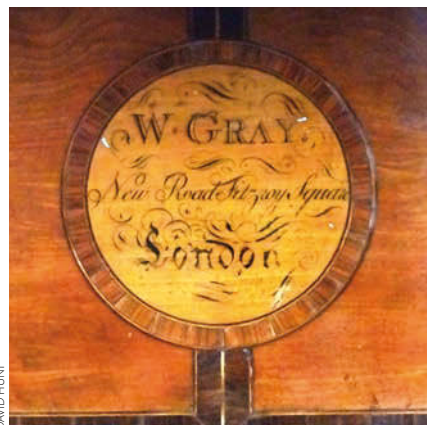


◁ Following Robert's death in Andover in 1796, William consolidated the firm's reputation. Samuel Green also died in 1796, and this created opportunities for his former competitors. William was now regularly in contention for jobs with George Pyke England, John Lincoln and Hugh Russell, and eventually with Thomas Elliott and James Bishop. Success in securing contracts for large three-manual instruments for St Paul's, Covent Garden (1798) and St Martin-in-the-Fields (1800) reveals his growing reputation among the London cognoscenti, while ambitious instruments for Wakefield (1804) and Huddersfield (1812) are evidence that the firm's renown was not limited to the metropolis. Some years later (1816), the reconstruction of the organ in St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin took Gray even further afield.

Yet London remained the main focus of the workshop's activities. City churches and proprietary chapels or chapels-of-ease in the west end and suburbs required new organs, and Gray's business flourished. Some of the larger contracts provided an opportunity for innovation. William Gray's years at the helm (1796-1821) coincided with the beginnings of the 'insular movement' when English organ builders experimented cautiously with the introduction of pedals and (sometimes) pedal pipes, enlarged Swells with more sophisticated swell boxes, pipe scales and semi-imitative registers. Gray's *magnum opus* – built in 1816 for the new St Marylebone Parish Church – is a case in point. The Great and Choir manuals

◀ Worcester, St Swithun: organ by Robert & William Gray, 1792

▼ English Organ School, Milborne Port: nameplate of chamber organ by William Gray, c.1809



► **Trunch, St Botolph: chamber organ by William Gray, 1808**

had a compass of FF to f3. There was an octave-and-a-half of pedals (FF-c) and an octave (C-c) of open wood 16ft pipes. The Swell compass began at tenor c and had an unusually generous provision of eight registers, including a French horn. The Choir, meanwhile, had a complete chorus including a mixture and a 16ft bass, and a 'violoncello' (actually a type of cremona). The Great still included eight ranks of mixtures, though it may be that these were deliberately balanced by two open diapasons. This 'highly finished and truly magnificent instrument', as the referees' report from Charles Wesley, Sir George Smart and Thomas Attwood described it, cost £975 – a considerable sum for an organ in the 1810s.

William Gray died in July 1821, leaving an estate valued at £14,000. He was succeeded by his son, John Gray, born in 1790, who seems to have been working with his father for some years.

The firm's earliest surviving ledger, with its record of invoices and payments, was commenced later that year and probably reflects John Gray's orderly and efficient approach to business.<sup>3</sup> It provides a unique and comprehensive picture of the work of a London organ builder in the 1820s and 30s. The market for chamber organs was in decline, although Gray built at least 18 between 1822 and 1840. For a time, the construction of barrel organs replaced them as a source of income, with numbers rising from one or two a year in the early-1820s, to 23 in 1840, but soon afterwards this demand began to slacken as 'finger' organs (and organists) became more common. Further income was generated by the hire of organs for provincial music festivals, and for London theatres and private houses during the 'season'; Gray's expanding tuning register (34 clients in 1825; 61 by 1839) was another source of regular income. But the lion's share of work consisted of the building and rebuilding of organs for churches. In 1822, for example, church work brought in £3,068, with only £77 from other clients; even in 1830, when domestic and concert jobs out-numbered church jobs by fourteen to seven, the former brought in £784 compared with £1,259 for the latter. ►



NICHOLAS THISTLETHWAITE

## St Marylebone Parish Church, London (1816)

<b>GREAT</b>		Fifteenth	2
(FF-f3)		Mixture	II
Open Diapason	8	Cremona	8
Open Diapason	8		
Stopped Diapason	8	<b>SWELL</b>	
Principal	4	(c-f3)	
Twelfth	2 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub>	Open Diapason	8
Fifteenth	2	Stopped Diapason	8
Sesquialtra	III	Principal	4
Mixture	II	Cornet	III
Furniture	III	Trumpet	8
Trumpet	8	Hautboy	8
		French Horn	8
		Clarion	4
<b>CHOIR</b>			
(FF-f3)			
Double Diapason bass	16	<b>PEDAL</b>	
Open Diapason	8	(F-c)	
Stopped Diapason	8	Double Pedal Pipes (C-c)	16
Principal	4		
Flute	4	<i>Couplers: Sw-Gt, Ch-Gt, Gt-Ped, Ch-Ped</i>	





NICHOLAS PULMLEY

◀ Throughout this period London remained Gray's most important customer. Between 1822 and 1830, 47 per cent of his commissions were from London clients, including major instruments for St Pancras New Church (1822), St Mark's, Kennington (1824), and St Mark's, Clerkenwell (1828). But he also built large organs in the provinces for All Saints, Southampton (1822), St Mary's, Bury St Edmunds (1826) and Sturminster Newton Parish Church (1827). One particularly significant contract was for the rebuilt church of St Mary, Blackburn (1828). It incorporated a number of innovative features. The Choir Organ was in its own case and enclosed in a venetian swell; the Pedal Organ had 18 double diapason pipes from GG, winded from its own bellows; and the Swell Organ was full-compass, by means of a 'choir bass' for the lowest octave-and-a-half. Apart from establishing Gray's credentials as an innovator, this Blackburn organ seems to have been the basis of a business connection with Lancashire, which led eventually to Frederick Davison's acquisition of a branch house in Liverpool in 1856.

As demand expanded, Gray found it expedient to enlarge his premises. He was able to lease adjoining properties to provide accommodation for his family and enable him to construct new workshops, offices, and a timber store (1827). By the 1830s, the spacious 'erecting room', where organs were assembled before being despatched to their destinations, was regularly used for public demonstrations of new organs. The organist Thomas Adams (1785-1858) was a particular favourite on these occasions. In many ways, his programmes prepared the way for the next generation of town hall organists, as for example in 1839 when his demonstration of Gray's new organ for St Philip's, Charleston (USA) elicited this startling comment from a reviewer in the *Musical World*: 'The overture to *Zauberflöte* was a truly wonderful performance, and the orchestral effects he produced would only be equalled, certainly not surpassed, by a large band ...'<sup>24</sup>

The 1830s saw a number of projects that boded well for the future. Gray undertook a major reconstruction of the old Harris/Byfield organ in St Sepulchre's, Holborn (1835). The organist was George Cooper, and he and his

◀ Bury St Edmunds, St Mary: organ by John Gray, 1826

son (another George) became strong partisans of Gray – and later, Gray & Davison – placing a good deal of work in the firm's hands. One such project was an extensive rebuilding of the Smith organ in Trinity College, Cambridge (1836); it included the enlargement of the Swell, extension of the Great keyboard compass to 16ft C, and insertion of double pedal pipes and a two-octave 'German' pedal board. In the same year, Gray supplied a temporary organ for a music festival in the Exeter Hall in the Strand. The pedal board was again of two octaves (C-c1) but was equipped with 'six stops, viz. four double diapasons and two trombones or double trumpets.' The inspiration for this unprecedented *embarras de richesse* is unknown.<sup>5</sup>

By the late 1830s, the business that John Gray had inherited from his father and uncle was in a flourishing state, exporting organs to North America and Australia, expanding its client base in the provinces, and maintaining existing connections in the metropolis. On the opposite side of the New Road was the workshop of William Hill, who was Gray's principal competitor. Meanwhile, Gray's apprentices included a young man named Henry Willis, and Gray's daughter was about to marry William Hill's former business partner, Frederick Davison. There were interesting times ahead. ■

#### References

1. These are discussed in, Nicholas Thistlethwaite, *Organ Building in Georgian and Victorian England: the work of Gray & Davison, 1772-1890* (Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 2020).
2. Text from the original (?) nameplate; the organ has been recorded on a CD by David Ponsford (*The power of music*, Riverrun Records, 2005).
3. A detailed analysis and job list extracted from this ledger will be found in Thistlethwaite, *Organ Building in Georgian and Victorian England* (2020), online supplement.
4. *Musical World*, vol. 12 (1839), 362.
5. Thistlethwaite, *The making of the Victorian organ* (Cambridge 1990), 181-2.

*Nicholas Thistlethwaite is a musical historian and organ consultant who has written extensively about English organs and church music. His book Organ Building in Georgian and Victorian England: the work of Gray & Davison, 1772-1890 was published by The Boydell Press in February 2020.*



## Freestyle BY GRAEME KAY

**Cometh the hour, cometh the woman; and joining together to combat isolation!**

For the last three years I have been planning, managing and fundraising for the Orford Organ Project – the rescue from long-term storage of the Peter Collins organ built in 1977 for the Turner Sims Concert Hall (TSCH) in Southampton, its restoration by the skilled craftsmen of Cousans Organs Ltd and its installation in St Bartholomew's Church in Orford. As anyone who has ever engaged in an organ project will recognise, I could write a book... The organ was dedicated on Easter Sunday 2019 and in the Organ Festival which followed, it was inaugurated by our brilliant consultant, Paul Hale, and further shown off in all its magnificent colours (both the copper and silver of the display pipes, and the wonderful tonal palette which Peter created with the organ's commissioner, the late Prof. Peter Evans) by guest organists William Saunders, Bernhard Haas and Catherine Ennis – who, after a cancellation, generously agreed to take on a double programme of Handel, Durufle and Poulenc's Organ Concerto.

But it felt like a major punctuation point, or even a milestone, when Cathy, who supported this undeniably difficult project right from the start by becoming one of its patrons, returned in February to give a recital which was later broadcast by Radio 3; she stayed on in Orford during a freezing week when the church heating played up, to record her programme with Priors for release on CD later this year. Her familiarity with the instrument dated back to the 1980s, when along with Christopher Bowers-Broadbent, John Scott, David Sanger and others, she recorded the organ for the BBC in the rather unforgiving acoustics of the TSCH. The sense of occasion at Orford's full-house recital in February was enhanced by the presence of Kevin Appleby, concert hall manager at Turner Sims, who had also supported us from the start, and longed for the Collins organ to find its voice again. Notwithstanding the organ's broadly north German baroque specification, Cathy's familiarity with the instrument and well-chosen programme of Bach, Frescobaldi, de Grigny, Handel, Mendelssohn, Brahms, Parry, Britten, Locklair and Reger showed off its myriad capabilities to perfection. Cathy is now a local hero in Orford. This is a public opportunity for me to say that I can't thank her enough.



▲ Catherine Ennis at Orford (© CLIVE BARDA/ARENAPAL)

As I write, the nation is going into lockdown; churches are closed, choirs are suspended and people are isolated. But a determination to contribute, and to continue to form communities to support ourselves, is being facilitated by the internet. Institutions such as the Berlin Philharmonic Digital Concert Hall and the Royal Opera House are streaming performances for free; individual musicians are giving performances online and some are making collective efforts, such as a moving version of Beethoven's 'Alle Menschen werden Brüder' made from home by members of the Rotterdam Philharmonic, which can be found at [bit.ly/2yOOXBg](https://bit.ly/2yOOXBg). Tom Daggett, St Paul's Cathedral's Organ Outreach Fellow, got in just before social distancing and the lockdown with his #hymnflashmob project which encouraged choirs of all shapes and sizes to post videos of favourite hymns online. And choral pied piper Gareth Malone has swung his considerable might – with support from Decca Records, Hal Leonard and Musicroom – behind the Great British Home Chorus, a daily vocal exercise and song session on the web. His first live video rehearsal brought in 14,000 people from around the world and has already logged a total of 137,881 views. Such widespread creativity and generosity will help see us through. ■

*Graeme Kay is a digital platforms producer for BBC Radio 3 and 4.*



Emily Hazrati

## A Clare Toccata

Using her passionate and inquisitive nature to fuel her toccatina for solo organ, Emily Hazrati talks to **Shirley Ratcliffe** about her many-feathered musical hat



ELAINE WONG

▲ A natural inclination to make things happen: Emily Hazrati

**E**merging composer Emily Hazrati is creative, enterprising and practical. As she confronts the difficulties besetting every young composer today she has been exploring different areas of concert management. 'A lot of my experience has stemmed from my natural inclination to make things happen,' she explains. 'I've realised it's valuable for composers to gain this early on. We often curate our own new music events and the most effective way of getting our music heard is by organising our own concerts using what we have at our disposal. The many musicians, managers and audience members involved in the events we organise is a great way of making meaningful contacts and experiences which feeds into our own development as composers.' This

includes publicising concerts, running competitions and festivals, giving faculty tours, organising budget plans and payments.

Hazrati will turn her hand to most things and seize every opportunity to write music: in 2015 she entered and won the Royal Opera House Fanfare Competition. Her Fanfare was recorded by the ROH Orchestra and used as a warning gong at the opera house for a year.

She is currently studying for an MPhil in Composition at Newnham College, Cambridge, and is an alto choral volunteer with the Choir of Clare College – singing is an extremely important part of her life. 'Clare was the most appealing choir to join because of the sheer variety of repertoire in their chapel services every week. We sing music from all over the world, a lot of it by

female composers, many underperformed works, and plenty of contemporary music. I particularly enjoyed performing Roderick Williams's *O Adonai*, which uses a combination of improvisatory elements and spatial effects to create a truly unique, haunting soundworld. As a prolific composer of choral music myself, getting such a broad experience of the choral repertoire is ideal, and hard to find.'

Hazrati has been influenced by many tutors. 'Every composition tutor I've had has brought something new to the table, so I have been influenced by several different ways of thinking. Toby Young encouraged me to be more ambitious and malleable in my approach to structure and scale, while Robert Saxton was particularly good at helping me to formalise my ideas and fine-tune how these were realised for the instruments or voices I was writing for. This year, working with current supervisor Jeremy Thurlow, feels like the perfect balance of attention to detail and broader self-reflection.'

In 2018 a life-changing process for Hazrati was writing a piece for SSAATTBB choir, *Morning Red*, in which she experimented with imaginative, unusual and ambitious choral textures in order to paint a dramatic picture of the sun rising and angels bursting the tomb open at Christ's resurrection. 'I was inspired by Joy Talbot's *Path of Miracles* and James MacMillan's *Seven Last Words from the Cross*,' she explains. 'Writing it broadened my horizons and transformed my attitude towards text-setting and writing choral music. My general compositional approach is now much freer.'

How did this 'prolific writer of choral music' react when Graham Ross, director of music at Clare College, asked her to write a post-service organ voluntary? 'I leapt at the

opportunity. While I had written for organ as an accompanying instrument, I had not written for solo organ. The possibilities are infinite writing for an instrument with such a wide textural, timbral and dynamic range. Graham advised that I write a fast voluntary and I was given a tour of the instrument by our junior organ scholar, George Gillow.

'At first it was a struggle until I started thinking about why Graham might have told me to write something fast. Post-service voluntaries come in all shapes and sizes: exuberant, reflective, playful, lyrical... What I began to internalise in my head was something bright, energetic, quickly transforming in mood and constantly moving. I wanted to write a piece which would induce a childlike sense of excitement in its listeners, which would display the organist's virtuosic possibilities, and which choirs would find particularly satisfying to process out to.'

## The possibilities are infinite writing for an instrument with such a wide textural, timbral and dynamic range

Hazrati came up with three contrasting pieces of material which gave her everything she needed to write the piece. 'Suddenly I had an epiphany ... what I'd written was a short toccata known as a toccatina. But by not consciously intending to write one, I had avoided the massive historical weight of the form. For me, the process of writing *A Clare Toccatina* was a great lesson in how a composer's intentions can change both before and during the compositional process.'

To widen her general experience, Hazrati has five piano students in Cambridge and has taken part in the community-based project Turtle Song. 'I think it's highly beneficial for a composer to have as broad an experience of and outlook on music as possible, both within and across communities, as well as how it benefits our wellbeing. I jumped at the chance to take "Music in the Community" as one of our modules for finals, which involved going on a nine-week placement and writing a reflective account of the experience.' The project she chose, Turtle Song, involved a

group of students and coordinators from Turtle Key Arts working with participants suffering from dementia, through singing, movement and song-writing. She feels the project has given her a more nuanced understanding of music's healing powers, as the intergenerational aspect of the project, the inclusion of the song-writing process, and the combination of music and singing had a transformative effect on participants' wellbeing.

Hazrati's final portfolio for her MPhil will focus on contemporary music's response to nature. 'Nature has always been a strong influence and guiding force in my compositions, so I saw the dissertation element as a great opportunity to explore its connection to contemporary music in greater depth. I think that while composers have always been inspired by nature, contemporary music has explored and commented on

nature in new and fascinating ways in the last two decades. Tansy Davies's *Forest* and John Luther Adams's *In the Name of the Earth* will form the central case studies for my essay, exploring contemporary's music's connection with nature to inform my own compositional engagement.'

Hazrati aims to continue composing as much as possible and expand her creative horizons. 'I would love to teach composition and harmony at both university and secondary school level. I am also interested in developing further as a singer, and work with choirs wherever possible.'

At the time of writing she is working as a student ambassador for the Britten Sinfonia. 'It involves me assisting with print distribution in both the university and local areas of Cambridge, as well as online marketing and targeted mailing. I also receive a week's work experience at the orchestra's offices in Cambridge. Another perk of being a Sinfonia student is free tickets to Britten Sinfonia concerts in Cambridge and Saffron Hall!' ■



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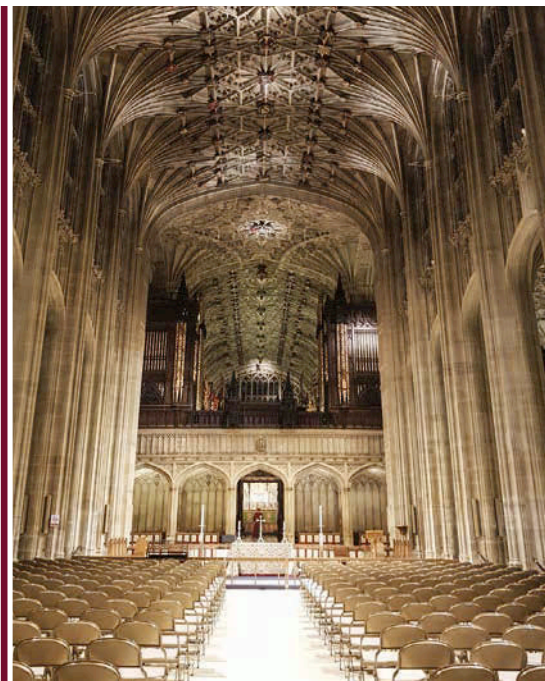
In view of the coronavirus pandemic, the premiere of *A Clare Toccatina* has been postponed. Details will be announced in due course.

To ensure that readers may benefit from the full six months' free download, the score of *A Clare Toccatina* will be placed online when the nationwide shutdown is over, and extensions will also be given to other scores already online. Visit [choirandorgan.com](http://choirandorgan.com) and click on New Music series for updates.



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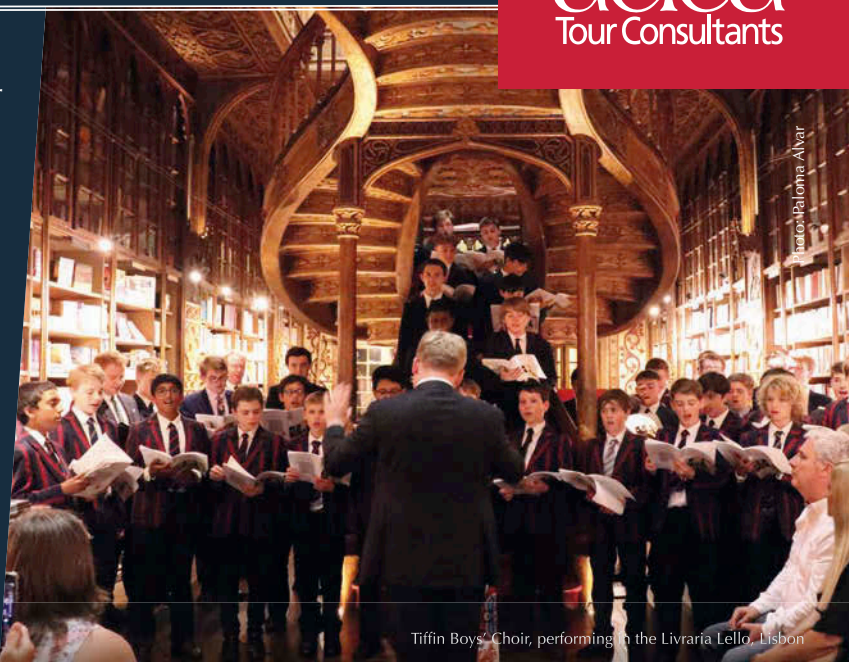
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# Weathering the storm

Remaining optimistic in these uncertain times is not easy, but the fresh-faced music department at Worcester Cathedral is leading by example. **Clare Stevens** meets new director of music Samuel Hudson

**W**orcester Cathedral has seen many memorable musical events in its long history, and on 16 March this year another was added to the history books when Worcester Festival Choral Society (WFCS) gave a 'ghost' performance of Vaughan Williams's *Sea Symphony* with their voices echoing down an empty nave. Knowing their planned concert the following weekend would have

to be cancelled because of the coronavirus outbreak, they sang the work through with piano accompaniment and no soloists or audience as a formal conclusion to their 2019/20 season. The irony of the words on the last page of the score – 'O, farther, farther, farther sail' – and the advertisement on the inside back cover for the same composer's *Toward the Unknown Region* was inescapable.

Within a few days public services in the cathedral had been suspended, the reception to announce and celebrate publication of the full programme for this year's Worcester Three Choirs Festival cancelled, and the only performance dates in the diaries of the cathedral's music staff were a new series of short online recitals by individual organists or singers every evening at 6.30pm (you

►

MICHAEL WHITEFOOT

▼ Worcester Cathedral's new director of music, Samuel Hudson: 'The benefits of cathedral choristerships are wide-ranging'







▲ Worcester Cathedral Choir participates in a Three Choirs Festival Evensong

◀ can find these on YouTube and Facebook @WorcesterCathedralChoir).

A couple of weeks previously, the city of Worcester – accustomed though it is to flooding – had been inundated to an almost unprecedented level in the latest of several severe episodes over the past few months that have seen the River Severn burst its banks, rendering some parts of the city inaccessible and transforming the view from the cathedral's song school. It has been quite an induction period for the cathedral's new director of music, Samuel Hudson, who took

up his post in September 2019 in succession to Peter Nardone. As well as overseeing all musical activities at the cathedral in tandem with canon precentor the Revd Dr Michael Brierley, directing Worcester Cathedral Choir and having specific responsibility for training its boy choristers, he is an artistic director of the Three Choirs Festival (a role shared with his counterparts in Hereford, hosting in 2021, and Gloucester, 2022) and director of music and conductor of WFCs.

Working most closely alongside him is Nicholas Freestone, the cathedral's

assistant director of music, director of the girl choristers and accompanist to the choral society. He too is relatively new to Worcester, having arrived from St Paul's, London, in the summer of 2018.

'We've had quite a changeover in the music team at Worcester Cathedral in the last 18 months,' admits the precentor. 'After a year in post, Nicholas Freestone was the longest-serving member of the department! It's a great honour for Worcester to have prepared musicians for wider roles in cathedral music-making – Ashley Wagner, our previous organ scholar, is now "number 2" at Birmingham, and Richard Cook, our previous "number 3", now acting "number 1" at St Edmundsbury. We're immensely grateful to departing musicians for what they have given us, as we are to Nicholas, who has settled into the cathedral so smoothly, and to the legendary James Lancelot [former organist and master of the choristers at Durham Cathedral] for a two-term injection of his unsurpassable skills as interim director of music. And it's been such a pleasure now to welcome Samuel Hudson to join us.'

Hudson has moved south from Blackburn Cathedral, Lancashire, where he was director of music from 2011, and also worked regularly for the BBC as organist and director of music for broadcasts of the Daily Service. Previously he was organ scholar at Girton College, Cambridge, and Wells Cathedral, and he has also held posts at St Sepulchre-without-Newgate, London and All Saints' Church, Hertford.

'I came quite late to church music, as a parish church chorister at St Mary's, Beddington, near Croydon,' Hudson admits. 'But I always loved music as a youngster and enjoyed playing the piano and cello throughout my school career.' Looking back at highlights of his previous jobs, he mentions being part of the team at Wells Cathedral at 'a very exciting time, when the new song school was opened,' and enjoying accompanying its Oratorio Society and the cathedral choristers under the direction of Matthew Owens. He also very much enjoyed his time at Blackburn, where he says there is 'a very ambitious music department, with an equal number and age range of boy and girl choristers. All the singers are voluntary, although they are extremely dedicated;

there is a complicated weekly schedule to ensure that music for worship is provided by a number of different groups on different days, but it really works.'

Although there has been a Christian church on its site for many centuries, Blackburn's St Mary the Virgin only became a cathedral in 1926. Development of the building since then culminated in 2016 with the completion of an entirely new residential and administrative precinct, including a cloister garth, refectory and library,

children and then with just a few moments to spare they arrived in front of the altar ready to sing the famous Easter hymn. I always felt Blackburn was a very can-do place, where ideas could be realised.'

A long interregnum between the announcement of Hudson's appointment and his arrival in Worcester meant he had plenty of time to prepare for the move and begin to meet some of his future colleagues. Now fully settled, he says he is enjoying living in Worcester and exploring

## 'Some journeys are so significant and transformative that they shape our lives and our history' – Samuel Hudson

financially supported by the construction at the same time of an adjacent hotel and office block. It has now launched a five-year plan for mission, worship and community engagement – which includes imaginative strategies such as distilling its own brand of gin, Cathedra, and blending its own coffee.

'The development really breathed new life into the cathedral,' Hudson recalls. 'They are thinking commercially, which is very important. I found it a great place to learn what it means to run a music department – how to communicate and work with colleagues and everyone else, from virgers to chorister parents and lots of different groups. It was also a really good place to dream up a project and bring it to delivery, which gave me experience that will be very useful here in planning activity with the Three Choirs Festival and also our daily schedule at the cathedral.'

'For example, we had a gala concert series at Blackburn, with one performance at Christmas and one in the summer, and one year I thought it would be a good idea to semi-stage Mascagni's opera *Cavalleria rusticana* in the cathedral, which was way beyond my comfort zone. We had a relationship with the Northern Chamber Orchestra, who played for it; I managed to recruit a team of soloists from the Royal Northern College of Music opera department, and all our choirs combined to form the chorus. Our choristers had their robes hidden away in a transept, so at one point they were dressed as Sicilian peasant

the surrounding countryside, and that everyone has made him very welcome. He and Nicholas Freestone are already working harmoniously in partnership, complementing and supporting one another, happy to switch roles from playing to conducting; Hudson describes his colleague as 'a great source of energy and guidance' who has really made his mark on cathedral life.

Worcester Cathedral Choir includes lay clerks, choral scholars and two teams of choristers: boys aged seven or eight to around 13 who are educated at the King's School next door to the cathedral, and girls from school year 7 upwards who are drawn from a variety of secondary schools. As with every church or cathedral choir, chorister recruitment is a priority; several probationers are already registered for the 2020/21 academic year, and a 'Be a Boy Chorister for an Afternoon' session was one of the last public events to take place in the cathedral before the current shut-down.

'I'm very aware from my previous experience that you have to sell the idea twice – to the potential chorister and to their parents,' Hudson says. 'So there needs to be plenty of singing for the children with our choristers, and an opportunity for us to talk to the parents about what they will get out of being a chorister and what they need to put in. It can be hard to explain the benefits, which can be so wide-ranging, but it does help when you have people like cricketer Sir Alastair Cook stating publicly how the discipline and commitment of working at a professional level as a chorister at St Paul's Cathedral

▼ Assistant director of music Nicholas Freestone, who conducts the Girls' Choir (rt)



GRAHAM LACDAO



CHRIS DOBBS





▲ Samuel Hudson conducts the Three Choirs Festival Youth Choir

◀ from the age of eight was crucial to his development as a sportsman.’

Worcester also has a voluntary choir made up of adults and boys, directed by the cathedral’s sub-assistant organist, Dr Ed Jones. The boys range in age from 6-14 and come from a wide variety of schools and backgrounds, rehearsing on Tuesday and Friday evenings. The altos, tenors and basses range from teenagers to long-serving and experienced singers, who travel from all corners of Worcestershire and beyond to join the boys on Fridays. The choir normally sings an evening service on Sundays, but also participates in special services and concerts.

A different and complementary choral resource is provided by the Worcester Cathedral Chamber Choir of women and men, which allows singers to take part in a wider variety of concerts and sings occasional cathedral services, directed by senior lay clerk Stephen Shellard.

The highpoint of every year for many of the singers associated with the cathedral is the Three Choirs Festival, hosted by the cities of Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester in rotation, with the host city providing the core of the liturgical choir, festival chorus and youth choir, augmented by smaller contingents from the other two. In addition to a feast of chamber performances, talks, theatre, exhibitions and children’s events, the programme features an orchestral concert in the cathedral every evening, most of them accompanied by the resident Philharmonia Orchestra and conducted either by distinguished guests or by the festival’s artistic directors. There is also a live broadcast of Choral Evensong on BBC Radio 3, when the combined cathedral choirs are conducted by the resident director of music.

Although the key pillars of the 2020 programme had been put in place before his appointment, Hudson says he has

had a pleasing amount of input on the detail. The chosen theme for the 293rd festival is ‘journeying’, marking the 400th anniversary of the *Mayflower*’s voyage from England to the USA in 1620, which gives an opportunity to feature American composers as well as exploring the idea more widely. ‘Journey is an inevitable part of life,’ says Hudson. ‘Some journeys we think nothing of, some we don’t even notice, but others are so significant and transformative that they shape our lives and our history. I’m thrilled my journey has brought me to Worcester, and to my first Three Choirs Festival programme.’ ■ [worcestercathedral.co.uk, 3choirs.org](http://worcestercathedral.co.uk, 3choirs.org)

*See News, p.9, for an update on this year’s Three Choirs Festival.*

*Clare Stevens works as a writer, editor and publicist in the Welsh Marches, where she sings with Hereford Choral Society.*

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SCOTT RYDER

# Work in progress

The reworking of Charles Fisk's Opus 46 to prepare it for its new home in Texas has set the firm's workshop buzzing with anticipation, writes **Barbara Owen**

**T**he eastern seaboard city of Gloucester, Massachusetts, has what might be described as a 'hands on' economy. Situated on Cape Ann, some 30 miles north of Boston, both fishing and ship building have been key to its development, while its scenic location has long attracted an artistic community of painters and sculptors. All of which makes it a fitting home for a company that combines industry, craftsmanship and artistry.

The legacy of founding president Charles Fisk, C.B. Fisk, Inc. occupies a 25,000 sq.ft, purpose-built workshop on Kondelin

Road in which a core group of some 20 organ builders – of whom at least a third are organists themselves – ply their trade. The scale of the company and its premises is such that there is no need to outsource: step inside, and you are as likely to find someone milling lumber as soldering metal, designing computer layouts or building scale models as cutting leather or voicing pipes in one of the three voicing rooms. Since my visit on 12 March, only the coronavirus has brought a temporary lull to the activity in the workshop, though it continues behind the scenes.

Before the virus struck, work in early 2020 involved the installation of Opus 154 in an Indianapolis church; on-site voicing still awaits. Other present 'work in progress' is now on two quite differing scales. In one part of Fisk's establishment, work is under way on numbers 155, 156, and 157, three continuo organs of unique design, housed in attractive hardwood cases with wooden façade pipes. Two differently tuned CC pipes and a transposable keyboard allow for either A=440 or A=415 accompaniment. The 8ft Flute is the basis; but unlike most similar instruments, there is both a Flute

and a Principal at 4ft pitch, which with a divided quint stop and an 8ft Principal from middle c can allow greater possibilities for dynamics, colour, and treble solos. An earlier prototype of this instrument is known to have succeeded as an effective team player with an orchestra and a large chorus.

Elsewhere in the workshop, something quite different is in process: the restoration of Charles Fisk's four-manual Opus 46, built in 1967 for Harvard's Memorial Church. The church, built in 1932, has an unusually long chancel, so designed to serve as a chapel for the weekly morning services, while the nave served for Sunday services, concerts, and large events. By the 1950s, the original Aeolian-Skinner organ was in poor mechanical condition, and a new

free-standing organ was recommended. Charles Fisk was chosen, and realised that the best free-standing position to efficiently project sound into the nave was central, blocking the large window at the far end of the chancel. The restricted depth of space resulted in three of the four manual divisions being stacked one above the other, plus a Choir division in the traditional Ruckpositiv position. The Swell was at floor level, its two departments flanking the console; Great and Positive occupied the two upper levels, to project above the rood screen into the nave. Housed in a classical casework, with gilded pipe shades, the instrument's stoplist was both classically influenced and eclectic.

Played very frequently in services and recitals, as well as by students, by 1980

heavy use and winter dryness were taking their toll. The combination action was outmoded, and the whole organ was overdue for cleaning. In early 1981 Charles Fisk prepared a proposal for the mechanical work, but also saw an opportunity for some tonal alterations, primarily related to reeds and mixtures: possibly replacing the Great and Swell 8ft Trumpets with more robust ones in the Cavaillé-Coll style; adding an Hautbois to the Swell; replacing the Great mixtures; and reorganising two Positive mixtures. Since most pipes would also have to be removed for cleaning and retuned, changing the temperament to a more flexible one devised by himself was also recommended.

Work was staged between the summer and autumn of 1983 – still largely

Some of the many stages of restoring Opus 46: (opposite page, from l) C.B. Fisk president Michael Kraft, Redeemer Church colleagues Barry McBee and chief musician George Dupere, and (foreground) designer Charles Nazarian review the design of Opus 46; (this page, clockwise from top l): Charles Nazarian discusses the scale model detail of Opus 46 and the preliminary building design; tonal director and vice-president David Pike discusses the keyboard restoration with George Dupere (on the bench) and Barry McBee; Jason Fouser builds the model; Mayu Allen and Thibaut Lenfant rebuild the Pedal chest action; early conceptual drawing of Opus 46 in Redeemer Church, Texas



SCOTT RYDER



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## C.B. Fisk, Inc. – how it all began



▲ Company founder Charles Brenton Fisk at the voicing jack

Following the second world war, as young organists from the USA visited Europe, they discovered historic organs, with mechanical action and tonal characteristics that opened their senses to a need for something more relevant to the historical literature. Initially satisfied by importation of European organs, by the early 1950s attempts to emulate the Europeans began to be made by a few North Americans, among them Charles Fisk. He had studied physics at Harvard University, taking part in musical activities there. Graduating in 1949, he entered Stanford University in 1950. Changing from physics to music, he was employed part-time by a local organ technician, leading to an apprenticeship with Walter Holtkamp Sr., then regarded as avant-garde.

In 1953 Fisk returned to his home state of Massachusetts, to a partnership with Thomas Byers, owner of the small Andover Organ Company, and in 1955 he became its sole proprietor. His first new organ was a two-manual instrument of 15 stops for Rice Institute in Houston, Texas. Following its completion in 1958, he made a brief trip to Europe and on his return built a small two-manual organ for a local Lutheran church.

Arthur Howes, who ran a summer school in nearby Methuen Music Hall, had accepted a position at Mount Calvary Episcopal Church in Baltimore, then needing a new organ. European builders had long delivery times,

so he turned to Fisk's small local company. The order for a large two-manual, with mechanical action, a neo-baroque 36-stop specification and classic casework, was challenging. Completed in 1961, it motivated Fisk's need for a larger facility; finding one in nearby Gloucester, he changed the corporate name to C.B. Fisk, Inc. As some employees had not wished to move, they began anew in the original workshop, retaining the Andover name.

Fisk had contracts for a rebuild and a small practice organ, but soon a contract was signed for a three-manual organ, completed in 1964 for the historic King's Chapel in Boston. With mechanical key action and tonally designed as a multi-purpose church organ, it became a template for later Fisk church organs of similar size, followed by another three-manual for Christ Church in Westerly, Rhode Island. Fisk's firm was then chosen to build a four-manual organ for Harvard University's Memorial Church, completed in 1967. Several smaller organs followed, along with two three-manual organs, for Center Church in New Haven, Connecticut, and Old West Church in Boston.

In 1974, Fisk's company moved to a new and larger purpose-built workshop in Gloucester, Massachusetts, and, along with several smaller organs, more large instruments followed. The University of Vermont acquired a Fisk concert organ in 1976, and 1979 saw the construction of a four-manual organ for

House of Hope Presbyterian Church in St Paul, Minnesota, followed in 1983 by a three-manual for Downtown Presbyterian Church in Rochester, New York. A large, unique dual-temperament organ was in progress for Stanford University, and Charles Fisk, although in failing health, had a major role in its design, but sadly did not live to see it installed.

Charles Fisk had established a firm known for the quality and character of the organs it built, then staffed by over a dozen skilled people. C.B. Fisk, Inc. became an employee-owned company and continued to grow, requiring enlargement of the workshop in 1987 and 1996, acquisition of high-quality machinery, and growth of personnel. Subsequent contracts ranged in size from continuo organs to concert hall organs in Dallas (1992), Yokohama, Japan (1998), Seattle (2000) and Costa Mesa (2008); several for colleges, among them Southern Methodist (1993), Rice University (1997), Oberlin College Conservatory (2001) and Indiana University (2009); plus large churches in Boston, Philadelphia, Seattle, Raleigh and elsewhere. Today Fisk organs can be found throughout the United States, and include exports to Japan, Hong Kong, South Korea, and a five-manual instrument for Lausanne Cathedral in Switzerland, the first US organ to be built for a European cathedral.

▼ Charles Fisk's Opus 46 in its original location in Harvard University's Memorial Church





SCOTT RIDER



SCOTT RIDER

▲ (from l) John Schreiner works on the continuo keyboards, which have boxwood naturals and rosewood sharps; Terry Joris racking the 2ft Octave

◀ supervised by Charles Fisk despite his rapidly declining health – but was still incomplete when Fisk died on 16 December. Beyond regular tuning and maintenance, no further alterations to Opus 46 were then proposed, and it continued to be regularly heard in church services and recitals into the early years of the 21st century.

But changes affecting Memorial Church were in the air. Plans were progressing to improve accessibility and acoustics, and to address visual issues, among them the large chancel window, obscured since 1967 by Fisk's Opus 46, renewing interest in relocating the choir and organ to the gallery. However, Opus 46, designed for a tall shallow space, would not fit that very different space. A new organ designed for the gallery was then commissioned from Fisk, and Opus 46 was offered for sale by Harvard.

Meanwhile, in Austin, Texas, Redeemer Presbyterian Church – with a large membership and an outstanding music programme under the leadership of George Dupere – was making plans for an impressive new masonry building, and had employed two consultants to assure that its acoustics would be favourable for music. Aware of the availability of the Harvard organ, they realised that it would be a perfect fit for the new building. Negotiations with Dupere and other church leaders commenced, and in 2007 Opus 46 changed hands. On 4 May 2010, Fisk personnel arrived to dismantle and pack the organ to take to their facility, where it rested from its labours for almost a decade. The Austin church building was still in planning stages,

and Fisk had some fairly large organs in line to be built. Redeemer Church already had a large building with a hall in which services and concerts were held. When Harvard's new Fisk organ, Opus 139, was ready for installation, a Holbrook organ – previously restored and installed by Fisk and housed in the gallery – became available, and in 2011 Redeemer Church acquired it for their hall, where it became a welcomed participant in services and concerts.

By early 2020 the essential parts of Opus 46 began to be erected in the workshop, as procedures for repair and renovation evolved. The day of my visit, George Dupere and his colleague, Barry McBee, were also visiting to see the organ partially set up, discuss plans and priorities for its restoration and to explore its placement within the developing building plan. To aid in this last consideration, a scale model had been constructed to help visualise and identify the opportunities and limitations inherent in the preliminary design.

In its new home, Opus 46 will look much as it did in Memorial Church, but with its voice favoured by superior placement and acoustics. Internally, necessary repairs, replacements and updates are under way. Aluminium trackers are being replaced by carbon fibre trackers, now employed by Fisk in new organs, and all worn plastic and leather action parts are being replaced, the objective being to make the action as stable and durable as in a new organ. Pipework is being cleaned and repaired; regulating and tuning will take place once the organ is fully assembled. One minor

change to be made is that the Choir will be moved forward about a foot-and-a-half, in order to allow passage between the back of its case and the organ bench.

Although desired from the beginning, the original placement in Harvard's Memorial Church made impossible the inclusion of any full-length 32ft stops; in its new location in Texas, these will be possible. Dupere and the church members are looking forward to the day when this fine instrument will assist the choir and congregation in their robust singing and take its place as a major concert instrument. In two years's time, Opus 46 will sing out once again, in its new, unimpeded and reverberant home, heralding a new chapter in the worship and musical life of both Redeemer Church and the city of Austin at large. ■

*As the coronavirus pandemic spreads, and while the workshop is closed, C.B. Fisk, Inc. has begun to manufacture face shields to donate to local hospitals for medical personnel to use in conjunction with the standard face masks. The firm's CNC machine allows an efficient and cost-effective way to put these out by the hundreds.*

*With thanks to Fisk staff: Michael Kraft, president; Steven Dieck, past president; Charles Nazarian, David Pike, Dana Sigall, John Schreiner. A complete Opus list may be found at [cbfisk.com](http://cbfisk.com).*

*Barbara Owen is an organist and author of several books about the organ, its history, and its music.*



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# Match made in heaven

Some professional relationships are purely functional, but the bond between one particular British composer and a US chamber choir is miles ahead of the curve. Paul Mealor and artistic director Mark Singleton reveal all to Harriet Clifford.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF STEPHEN LURIE

‘There’s a saying that too many chefs spoil the broth – I don’t believe it,’ says Mark Singleton emphatically, neatly summarising his approach to his role as artistic director of Voce, an all-professional chamber choir based in New England. Speaking before an afternoon of filming with the composer Paul Mealor, he explains, ‘I believe the more feedback you get from your artists, and the more feedback you get from your composer, the better you will be in the long run.’

Beginning their work together in 2017, Mealor and Singleton first came across one another through a series of chance meetings and mutual friends. Mealor’s profile had risen since his *Ubi caritas et amor* was performed at the wedding of Prince William and Catherine Middleton in 2011, while Singleton founded Voce with the choir’s president, Tom Cooke, in 2006, building its reputation over the years and recording several albums, including a collaboration with Morten Lauridsen. After the royal wedding, Singleton took a ‘deep dive’ into YouTube and came across Mealor’s *A Tender Light*, which he then played to his six-month-old daughter to help her relax: ‘The same sensation happened to us in all our adulthood when we first came to the scores. It was as though this had always been here, we just hadn’t heard it before.’

Having arranged to sit down together, Mealor and Singleton decided to present a concert; and before the performance was over, Mealor announced that he would be working with Voce on an album. ‘The thing I was fascinated by,’ says the composer, ‘was the actual sound of the choir. They really don’t sound like any other choir I’ve ever worked with.’ The members sing *sotto voce*, and this gentle, sensitive singing suits Mealor’s writing, particularly his sacred spiritual music. ‘We paint with pastels,’ adds Singleton, ‘we rarely paint with oils.’

The feeling of suitability was mutual, Singleton explains: ‘One of the things that Paul and I talked about before he came over [to New England] is that the sound is invitational. As performers we often talk about the fishbowl, where people look in and watch the performers perform. What we try to do as Voce is invite them into the process of being artists, and I saw Paul’s music as one of the best ways of being able to do that.’ The genuine friendship that has evolved from a professional relationship is palpable in the room, as Mealor explains that Voce has taken on some of his most difficult work ‘without a second thought’. ‘Almost every member of the choir has now become a really good friend of mine. The great thing about that is that we get honesty – the performance becomes honest. I consider myself, the composer, as a member of the choir.’

▲ ‘Serving harmony’: Mark Singleton conducts the New England chamber choir Voce





▲ A working partnership: (l) conductor Mark Singleton, and (r) composer Paul Mealor in a recording session for Voce's new CD of his music

► Voce in rehearsal and concert, and taking post-concert applause with Paul Mealor

◀ On 16 May, Voce perform Mealor's *The Souls of the Righteous*, a Requiem commissioned in 2018 to mark a century since the end of the first world war. Premiered by the National Youth Choir of Scotland and the Royal Scottish National Youth Orchestra, the piece takes Welsh poet Grahame Davies's original meditations on the Mass themes and raises questions around how we view the war today. Faced with what he has described as one of the most challenging works of his career, Mealor says, 'I decided I was not going to write something that people expect. We have the Requiem movements of course, but then we have Grahame's words, which spiral around

In March this year, the pair's plans to release a collaborative album came to fruition in the form of *Blessing: The Music of Paul Mealor*, so called after the title track 'Blessing' and by way of describing the choir's relationship with the composer. 'It sounds rather cheesy,' admits Mealor, 'but it's not meant to be – it's actually truthful. It's very unusual in the music world, that everything just clicks – there's always something wrong somewhere.'

Several pieces on the album proved this point by presenting challenges along the way. As the titular piece is written in two tempi – the piano in one and the choir

## 'If we are not singing the here and now, then what will "now" be in 50 years?' – Mark Singleton

those, and they're stunning words: "To those who have walked in the shadows of war, bring peace." Not just the ones who have won, but the ones who have lost, because everybody's lost.'

As part of Voce's performance, the choir will be premiering four reflections on Mealor's piece by the composers John Frederick Hudson, Henrik Dahlgren, Joanna Gill and James Aburn. Singleton laughs: 'Who does this? Who actually says, "I want other composers to make their own artistic commentary on the work that I have already put out, and a work that's already successful?" When he came up with that idea, it just reinforced that this is what we're about. This is artists sitting around a table, talking, dreaming, and what happens will happen.' A fifth premiere in the concert will come as an encore, a piece by Mealor celebrating the reign of Queen Elizabeth II.

in another – the only way to conduct it is to conduct a third tempo, 'which confused everybody,' explains Mealor, so they decided to remove the conductor all together. 'It was remarkable. You just stand back and let the artists do their thing,' says Singleton. In recording *All wisdom cometh from the Lord* – 'a very unusual piece with an epic soprano solo' – they found that it wasn't 'gelling' with the choir, so Singleton came up with the idea of re-orchestrating it, adding in an organ. 'I was nervous about telling him, because it was a featured work on the album. When you're talking to a composer and you say, "I have another idea for your piece", one out of every 100 is going to listen. Paul's that one in a 100.'

Mealor's music is spiritual and reflective, often evoking deep emotions in the singers, conductor, composer and listeners alike. He has received harrowing letters from people describing the effect his music has

had on their lives: 'There was a guy who wrote to me in Texas after the royal wedding and he said, "On the morning of that wedding, I had a rope around my neck. I hear this music and I want to find out what it is. So, I take the rope from around my neck – you saved my life." This is amazing – you don't set out to do that! Recently a mother whose son was dying of leukaemia [wrote to me]. She said they played *The Beatitudes* as he died.' *The Beatitudes* has been recorded by Voce on *Blessing*, in what Mealor describes as the best recording of anything he's ever written.

The conversation moves on to what Singleton means when he says that Voce's mission is to 'serve harmony'. 'I'm not just talking about serving the harmonic spirit of the music, it goes beyond that. It speaks to how we treat one another when we're inside a rehearsal space. In a nutshell, it's that we're all working with each other and for each other. You cease to become the individual that you are outside this rehearsal space, and you check your ego at the door.' Trying to 'eliminate discord' in a rehearsal, Singleton is aware that telling a singer that their D is out of tune, for example, is a completely different criticism from telling a cellist (like Singleton himself) that they are out of tune. He assigns leaders among his singers, to whom he feeds back before allowing the singers to address the problems themselves. As he explains, it does not serve harmony to say to someone in front of a room full of people, 'You're out of tune, you need to fix it'.

As well as serving harmony, Voce and their artistic director are committed to performing new music. 'If we are not singing the here and now, then what will "now" be in 50 years? We have to be supporting these musicians who are bleeding onto the page, giving everything they have to organisations and ensembles that exist right now.' Rather than commissioning new works itself, the choir is often approached by composers who have been unable to get their piece performed following a commission. 'Often these commissioned pieces will spend their lives sitting on a shelf collecting dust, which is a horrific shame. When it's commissioned, it needs to bear fruit, and we are the water for that.'

In his role as a professor of composition at the University of Aberdeen, Mealor often poses the question, 'What is music?' 'It isn't what I hear in my head, it isn't what's written down on the page, it isn't necessarily what each singer learns – is it the final thing that the listener hears? It's the most amazing thing because music is so ephemeral, you can't pin it down. That's why I love it.' ■

*Voce's performance of Paul Mealor's The Souls of the Righteous, scheduled for 16 May at St Patrick-St Anthony Church, Hartford, Connecticut, USA, alongside the world premieres of four reflections on the work, has been postponed until further notice. [voceinc.org](http://voceinc.org), [paulmealor.com](http://paulmealor.com)*





# Performance review

**Douglas Reed** gives pointers on how to tackle William Albright's virtuosic organ music, which calls for a rethink about how the hand is used

## part 5 William Albright: 'Melisma' from *Organbook 1*



**W**illiam Albright (1944-98) premiered *Organbook* on 17 October 1967, at Hill Auditorium during the University of Michigan's Annual Organ Conference. Five pieces comprised the suite: *Benediction*, *Melisma*, *Fanfare*, *Recessional* and *Chorale Prelude*.<sup>1</sup> The third major Albright work to sound forth in as many years from the great E.M. Skinner/Aeolian-Skinner organ<sup>2</sup>, these works literally set the stage for more than 20 additional solo and ensemble organ compositions the composer penned during his brief life: the most important and innovative corpus of 20th-century American organ literature after 1950.<sup>3</sup>

At Albright's 1998 memorial service, composer Leslie Bassett observed, 'His organ music is brilliant, powerful, unique. He discovered innovations that organists had never thought about, considered impossible or avoided as violating the sacred canon of tradition.'<sup>4</sup> Indeed, it was *Melisma's* flamboyant display of cluster glissandos, climaxing in an outburst from the massive Pedal 16ft Ophicleide that may have led some church organists in the audience to exclaim at the following intermission, 'What is he doing to that organ?!'<sup>5</sup> A conference reviewer suggested that *Organbook* was 'perhaps open to question as serious music.'<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, during the next 25 years, the American Guild of Organists commissioned Albright to compose numerous works including his last two major collections – *Whistler (1832-1903): Three Nocturnes* (1989), and *Flights of Fancy* (1991-92).<sup>7</sup>

Albright earned three degrees from the University of Michigan School of Music where, on completion of the doctorate

◀ William Albright: 'brilliant, powerful unique music'

(1970), he joined the composition faculty. He studied mainly with Ross Lee Finney, whose teaching encouraged wide stylistic diversity, including use of electronic sounds.<sup>8</sup> Albright had studied earlier with George Rochberg at Tanglewood (1966) and later, with the support of a Fulbright grant, with Olivier Messiaen in Paris (1969).


It is helpful to understand that Albright's organ music sprang from the musical mainstream in which, more than 50 years earlier, composers such as Debussy, Stravinsky and Schoenberg had led the search for new modes of expression outside traditional European practice. By mid-century, Messiaen influenced avant-garde composers at Darmstadt; American innovators include Ives, Varèse, Cowell, and Harrison.<sup>9</sup> Many leading composers developed new ways of organising and notating music for traditional instruments. By 1940, US expatriate Conlon Nancarrow, whose music Albright greatly admired, had begun composing for player piano.<sup>10</sup> After the second world war, Karlheinz Stockhausen and Edgar Varèse developed electronic music, the sounds of which influenced many younger composers including Albright.<sup>11</sup> In 1961, several former students of Ross Lee Finney formed the experimental ONCE concerts, which incorporated electronic, visual and improvisational elements.<sup>12</sup>

## Albright compared listening to new music with little repetition to looking out of a train window at constantly changing, but recognisable, scenery

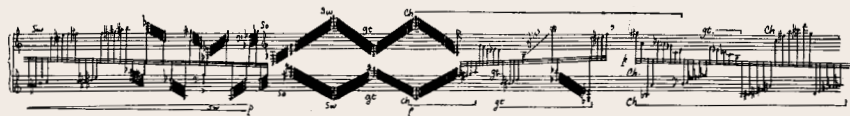
The advent of electronic music called for reconsideration of all musical parameters by those composers who realised that, rather than only 12-pitch classes, infinite numbers of pitches – the building blocks of sound itself – lay at their fingertips. The primary means of organisation included organic growth and juxtaposition of contrasting materials. Successions of contrasting timbres, textures and blocks of sound, neatly described by Schoenberg's 'Klangfarbenmelodie', became primary structural elements.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, in light of developments such as cubism and primitivism in other art forms, musical form itself was redefined.<sup>14</sup> Speaking of organic development, Albright observed

**Ex.1: The opening kernel of 10 notes, which grows organically through the piece**  
*legato, as fast as possible*



**Ex.2: Broadening waves of motion create an expanding wedge-like form**



that 'one can arrive at Z only after A, B, C...' <sup>15</sup> He compared listening to much new music with little repetition to looking out of a train window and viewing the constantly changing, though recognisable, scenery.<sup>16</sup>

In composing for a particular instrument, Albright's primary questions were 'What is the most basic attribute of the medium?' and 'What does the sound want to do?' The most fundamental characteristic of the organ is its sustaining ability. Pitches are either sustained (static) or changing/moving. Thus, we encounter a basic principle – juxtaposition of opposites: sound/no sound; sustained/not sustained; motion vs stasis.

Albright's *Melisma* is a beautiful example of organic growth. A small kernel (the first 10 notes) discovers its full potential during the course of the piece [Ex.1]. Rapid, sweeping motion juxtaposed with static, sustained elements provide musical tension. Lengthening and broadening a-periodic waves of motion create development and an expanding wedge-like form [Ex.2].

Traditional tonal elements are often subtly at work in Albright's music.<sup>17</sup> Although *Melisma* is not in a traditional key, the pitch B is prolonged in several ways after its first appearance at the beginning:

- Page 7/line 2: LH chord
- 9/1 (beginning): B7 arpeggio resolves deceptively to FM (+B)
- 9/3: Pedal entrance on B/D-sharp
- 9/4: RH chord progression resolving to Bm+7

In traditional functional terms, B resolves as a leading note: the final cadential clusters rise upward from a carefully placed, accented C in the Pedal [Ex.3, overleaf].

The composer offered several corrections to the printed edition:<sup>18</sup>

- Page 6/line 2: Second LH event (D/B-flat) is a cluster, not a minor sixth.
- 9/1: Insert treble clef before last group of RH notes preceding Gt cluster glissando.
- 9/2: Delete D in dyad D/E (last group of LH notes before descending Gt cluster glissando).
- 9/3: Pedal glissandi: left foot descends on sharp keys from D-sharp; right foot ascends on natural keys from B.
- 9/3: LH chord after Choir diminuendo should be on the Great.
- 9/4: Slur between pedal C-D should be a glissando.

Albright's concern for idiomatic gesture is clear: all groups of fast notes fit under the hand. However, rather than traditional chromatic fingering, all five fingers are employed in many passages from the beginning. Larger gestural movements of the hand and arm, rather than isolated finger movement, can be promoted by sketching in starting points for fingering, rather than



**Ex.3: Climax and cadential clusters over accented Pedal C**

◁ numbers for every note. Blocking out hand positions by lightly depressing the keys, or simply resting the fingertips on the keys, helps discover hand position coordination without overtaxing the fingers.<sup>19</sup>

Spatial notation can elicit a spontaneous, improvisatory approach to musical flow, rhythm, and timing as no time signature, note values or rhythms are indicated. Instead, the performer can discover a wave-like rhythm akin to the flow of Gregorian chant, the source of the piece's title. Sensitivity to the quality of sound and room acoustics can help determine the actual speed of the notes, which may not need to be literally 'as fast as possible'. Indeed, it is important to allow time ('rubato') for important tonal references (noted above) to be heard. The actual speed will reveal itself with careful listening in the course of learning.<sup>20</sup>

Several examples of arpeggiated attacks and releases reflect both refined organ technique and the influence of electronic music technique in which the composer must determine the character of both the onset and cessation of the pitch 'envelope'. In the preface of *Organbook*, Albright suggests playing *molto legato* as the cluster glissandos 'should seem like a natural extension of the simpler scalar passages.'

Cluster glissandos in *Melisma* are chromatic (both naturals and sharps) except as noted. While starting and stopping points are precisely notated and need to be carefully learned at slower tempos, the composer advised not to be overly

concerned about these in performance. Loose wrists and arms will facilitate glissandos and cluster glissandos on most instruments.<sup>21</sup> Narrower cluster glissandos (as in the first line) call for two or three fingertips as in *Organbook 3* (*Scherzo: Chimaera*). Light weight can be placed on either the fleshy part of the outside of the hand or on the inside of the hand rather than on the flat of the hand. Practise on the surface of the keys with minimal/passive finger action. Some electro-pneumatic instruments with so-called 'tracker touch' may present insurmountable challenges. Wearing modified gloves may assist.<sup>22</sup>

For the three-note pedal glissando (9/4), the left foot plays sharp keys; the right foot plays two notes on the naturals. Keep knees and heels together and low to avoid noise on three-note descending glissando. Nicely polished pedal keys and leather-soled shoes will facilitate this gesture, a sighing resignation after previous frantic activity, which can be slower than the notation suggests.

The registration for *Melisma* is simple: contrasting and balanced flute tone on several divisions including an antiphonal division if available. The Hill Auditorium Quintaton 16ft had almost no fundamental.<sup>23</sup> If there is no 16ft Quintaton on the Great, an 8ft flute will suffice; Bourdon 16ft/4ft flute works on some organs. If the Pedal 8ft flute is too loud (last two lines of piece), use a softer sound coupled from a manual division.

On a three-manual organ, play Solo

passages on the Swell. Use subtle swells to change dynamics/colour. On a two-manual organ, adjust manual changes and use Swell shadings to create colour/dynamic shadings in order to approximate the number of timbral changes. Where there is only one enclosed division, play passages calling for dynamic changes on the Swell. On an instrument with no enclosed division, adjust (shorten), if necessary, the length of sustained elements. A sense of improvisation and proportion guided by musical instincts and acoustics of the room is paramount.

Today's performer has the advantage of listening to three recordings of *Organbook 1* including the composer's own, made in 1970 on the Hill Auditorium organ.<sup>24</sup> Although few of the church organists at the 1967 premiere might have imagined these pieces' suitability for a service of worship, all have been used in liturgy. Since 1967, liturgical reforms as well as refinements in many congregation's understanding of the role of music in worship, suggest that *Melisma* might well find a place in the liturgy, particularly during the seasons of Easter and Pentecost. ■

## References

1. Albright, William. *Organbook*. Paris: Société des Éditions Jobert, 1969 (retitled as *Organbook 1* after the publication of *Organbook 2*). Jobert published only the first four movements.
2. For details, see [bit.ly/3bkRxQW](https://bit.ly/3bkRxQW).
3. For a complete annotated list of Albright's composition, see [bit.ly/3bkZfuE](https://bit.ly/3bkZfuE).
4. Bassett, Leslie. 'In Praise of William Albright,' *Perspectives of New Music*, vol.37, no.1, Winter 1999, pp. 27-29.
5. Comments heard by author at the concert.
6. Robinson, Lillian. 'Organ Music Conference at Ann Arbor,' *The Diapason*, December 1967, p.23.
7. For AGO commissions, see *The American Organist*, 'William Albright's Whistler (1834-1903): Three Nocturnes', July 2019.
8. Under Finney's leadership Karlheinz Stockhausen had lectured at the University of Michigan in 1958, and in 1963 Finney established an electronic music studio. Only a few steps from the Hill Auditorium organ stood a room filled with tape recorders, sine-wave generators, and other electronic

equipment. Albright would soon become its associate director.

9. One of many sources on music of this period: Alan Rich: *American Pioneers: Ives to Cage and Beyond*. London: Phaidon Press, 1995.
10. See *Study for Player Piano no.21*, bit.ly/3aex00v.
11. Stockhausen's *Gesang der Jünglinge* (1955-56; bit.ly/39bHDja) influenced Albright's development as a young composer. For a discussion of the relationship between *Melisma* and Albright's work in electronic music, see bit.ly/2xmueHG.
12. An extensive booklet accompanying a 5-CD recording *Music From The Once Festival 1961-1966* (New World Records 80567-2) documents the foundation of ONCE and Albright's involvement. Comparison of Albright's *TIC* (for soloist, two jazz-rock improvisation ensembles, film and tape) with *Organbook*, both written in 1967, show the influence of ONCE and the relative conservatism of *Organbook*. See also Emily Weingarten's *The Music of ONCE: Perpetual Innovation* (2008).

13. Echoes of Schoenberg's *Five Pieces for Orchestra*, op.16, no.3 ('Colors/Summer Morning by a Lake') can be heard in Albright's *Benediction*, the first movement of *Organbook*.
14. See Glenn Watkins *Pyramids at the Louvre: Music, Culture, and Collage from Stravinsky to the Postmodernists*. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1994.
15. William Albright lecture, 'A Present and Future for the Organ', Hartt College Contemporary Organ Music Festival, 1973.
16. William Albright lecture, University of Evansville, c.1986.
17. See Edwin Hantz, 'An Introduction to the Organ Music of William Albright', *The Diapason*, May 1973, pp. 1, 4-5.
18. Author's conversations with the composer.
19. See also <https://go.aws/2J94QId>.
20. For perspective, see *Scherzo (Chimaera)* from *Organbook 3* (C.F. Peters). *Scherzo* might well serve as a preparatory etude for *Melisma*.
21. See George Ritchie and George Stauffer: *Organ Technique Modern & Early*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice

Hall, 1992, p. 342-344 for glissando/cluster glissando exercises.

22. See Stockhausen *Klavierstück X* (1955): bit.ly/3agqOow
23. In a late 1990s revision, the 1955 Aeolian-Skinner Great Quintaton 16ft was removed and the original E.M. Skinner Bourdon 16ft (borrowed from the Pedal) reinstated.
24. Albright's original recording: bit.ly/2xzLUzU; David Craighead's recording: bit.ly/33ZK0Vi; Douglas Reed's recording includes the original unpublished fifth movement (*Chorale Prelude*): <https://apple.co/2UbYWMV>.

*Douglas Reed is Professor Emeritus of Organ at the University of Evansville. An international performer and contributor to the Cambridge Companion to the Organ, he is the leading authority on the organ music of William Albright.*

#### ► NEXT ISSUE

Part 6: Daniel Cook on the Organ Sonatas of Charles Villiers Stanford

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## David Hill answers your questions about all matters relating to choirs and their conductors

### **W**hat is the role of a conductor?

Conductors are a very privileged group of people who have the responsibility of directing groups of musicians in rehearsals and performances. Done well, they rehearse and guide the music in a fashioned manner and will enable the performers to feel empowered and inspired to give their best. Here are the issues at the heart of what conducting is all about.

### **Planning rehearsals**

Always approach a rehearsal carefully planned, and with a sense of anticipation as to what must be achieved. I don't advocate rehearsing in short sound bites. Isolate the sections needing the most work and allow the musicians time to assimilate their responsibilities: most importantly, listen to what is happening and respond accordingly. I see too many rehearsals following a plan but failing to address the issues.

### **Use your ears**

Listening and defining what is happening to music, our ears will be at different levels of development. Some are more developed for sound quality, others for intonation and rhythm. In preparing the score carefully, include analysing those moments that we

all know will cause technical difficulties and will need rehearsal. It might be a process of trial and error to find the solutions.

### **Mood and tempo of rehearsals**

Rehearsals must be a mixture of hard work, fun, humour and education. Conductors hold the attention (or not) of those we are working with. Keep the rehearsal fast-moving, gauging how everyone is responding, adding some humour, even anecdotes, but only occasionally. Clarity of thoughts and insights about the music and the words will help singers better understand what it is they are being asked to do. By the end of a rehearsal, our singers and players should feel energised and better prepared by the experience. Speaking about the mood and meaning of the music will be appreciated, particularly if the works are unfamiliar. Conducting is as much about educating as it is processing.

### **Knowing the score**

It is essential to have undertaken detailed analysis of the music along with its message and meaning. Understand the structure, pace and words with clear indicators in the score. Use different coloured pencils for the process of analysing.

### **Should we practise conducting in advance of a rehearsal?**

Unequivocally yes! Have a mirror on a surface sufficiently high for you to observe your movements. Never conduct with another recording in the background: you will be in danger of thinking the sensation will be the same when you are directing others. In looking at the mirror, you can then see whether the beating is clear enough for you to be able to follow. Use a metronome to check if you are thinking the most appropriate speeds.

### **How demanding can a conductor be?**

Conductors are leaders and have a responsibility of care for those they are directing. The old-fashioned notion that a conductor can do and say anything they like is over. Why is this? Quite simply,

society has changed and people, rightly, demand respect. Whether the amateur singer giving their time or a professional orchestral player who sees it as 'going to work', neither expects to be treated in any other way than with respect. Nevertheless, high standards can be achieved with all involved empowered to give their best. It is possible to be demanding, but only when people feel engaged to join the conductor in the quest for excellence.

A conductor, working with a professional orchestra in Scandinavia, was in a grumpy, uncommunicative mood during the rehearsals. When it came to the concert, the orchestra decided not to begin on his first downbeat: very bold on their part and surely alarming to the audience. The conductor looked startled and shocked while a voice came out of the double-bass section, 'That's the sound the conductor makes!'

As conductors we make none of the sound; and yet, by influencing the situation with insight, clarity and passion for what is happening, we make all the sound unite. While conducting is perhaps the most mercurial of the arts, how we go about it is constantly fascinating. ■

*David Hill is musical director of The Bach Choir and Leeds Philharmonic Society, principal conductor of Yale Schola Cantorum, and associate guest conductor of Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra.*

### **▼ Conducting, 'the most mercurial of the arts'**



COURTESY DAVID HILL

Do you have any questions relating to choral direction and singing? Send them to David Hill via the editor: [maggie.hamilton@markallengroup.com](mailto:maggie.hamilton@markallengroup.com)





Taking in vertigo-inducing organs, strolls by the river and a midsummer festival, **Clare Stevens** explores the delights of Cologne, musical and otherwise

**T**he German city of Cologne with its spectacular twin-towered cathedral may not need much introduction to some *C&O* readers: the cathedral's 'swallow's nest' nave organ, installed by Klais of Bonn in 1998 and suspended with its lower edge a dizzying 20 metres above floor level, is a

magnet for both players (as long as they can conquer any fear of heights) and listeners.

The foundation stone of the Gothic cathedral was laid in 1248 and the original intention was to build a fitting shrine for the mortal remains of the Three Kings, which Archbishop Rainald von Dassel

had brought back to Cologne in 1164 from the conquered city of Milan, making the cathedral one of the most important pilgrimage destinations in Europe. Building stopped in the early 16th century, however, with the towers left incomplete for 300 years. Not until the middle of the 19th century did the German romantic movement inspire a desire to finish the job; King Friedrich Wilhelm IV laid another foundation stone in 1842 and by 1880 the cathedral was completed, in accordance with the medieval plan.

Its towers are more than 157m high, the second tallest in Europe, and its western façade is the widest in the world, at 61.54m. The wealth of riches inside make the cathedral a worthwhile destination in itself – 'must-sees' include the stunning Shrine of the Magi, the work of medieval goldsmith Nicholas of Verdun, and the striking modern window by Gerhard Richter in the south transept, completely different in style from the rest of the cathedral's stained glass.

The central zone of Cologne follows a shallow western curve of the Rhine, with the main streets fanning concentrically outwards from the cathedral and the main railway station. Dotted around the same semicircle are 12 Romanesque churches that also justify a visit to Cologne, especially in early summer when they host Romanischer Sommer ('Romanesque Summer'), a festival that brings instrumental and vocal music from a variety of periods and countries to a number of the churches.

The festival has been in existence for 31 years, launched to mark completion of the rebuilding of the 12 churches following the destruction of the second world war. Its aim is to encourage visitors to experience their unique architecture and scale through atmospheric connections between sound and space.

Last year the programme included an outdoor installation in the old convent herb garden outside one of the churches, St Cecilia's; loudspeakers planted in the flower beds and wind chimes hung from the trees created a gentle vocal and instrumental soundscape next to a busy city street. St Cecilia's was the guild church of the painters of medieval Cologne, and was also part of the city's first public hospital. Although it remains a consecrated church,

▼ Cologne Cathedral houses a wealth of riches



CLARE STEVENS





CLARE STEVENS



RAIMOND SPEKING

▲ Cologne Cathedral's Klais organ, and (rt) St Cecilia's, the guild church of painters in medieval Cologne, is the Schnütgen Museum of medieval art

its primary identity is as the Schnütgen Museum of medieval art, displaying both permanent and temporary exhibitions of stone-carving, metalwork and stained glass.

Nothing quite prepares you for the sight of the Golden Chamber in St Ursula's, where the walls are decorated from floor to ceiling with relics (booking a guided tour will ensure you gain access to this inner sanctum). St Ursula was a Breton princess who is reputed to have suffered martyrdom in Cologne together with 1,000 female companions. As the church dedicated to her memory was extended in the 13th century, the chancel walls were built with dual shells to create additional space to display its collection of relics.

One of the largest Romanesque churches is the monumental St Aposteln, in the centre of the city just off the New Market. Its most striking features are its clover-leaf chancel and an octagonal dome above the crossing, which gives it an almost byzantine appearance. Nearby, in an unexpected location on the top floor of a modern shopping centre, is the beautiful, light-filled gallery holding Cologne's collection of drawings, prints and sculptures by Käthe Kollwitz, documenting the social conditions of the poor and the aftermath of war in the early 20th century.

As Roman Catholic places of worship, most of the churches impose strict limitations on the type of music that may

be performed in them. More freedom is allowed in St Peter's, also known as the Kunst-Station or Art Station, where experimental art is valued as highly as the liturgy. It is an almost empty space that can be used as a blank canvas: an ideal venue for a theatrical late-night programme of contemporary music performed by Neue

German and French singers and players Les Lumières; and the Dortmund Youth Choir. The festival will conclude as it always does with a long, late evening of promenade performances by a variety of choirs and instrumentalists in the vast church of St Maria im Kapitol. The audience can move from nave to transept or chancel

## The cathedral's 'swallow's nest' nave organ is a magnet for both players and listeners

Vocalsolisten Stuttgart and a screening of Carl Theodor Dreyer's silent film *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, accompanied by renaissance music by composers including Dufay, Binchois and Loqueville, sung by the Orlando Consort.

In between concerts and visits to churches and museums, visitors can enjoy a stroll in the city's Botanic Garden, followed by a cable car ride across the river and a walk along the Kennedy Plaza. The perfect stop for afternoon 'kaffee und küchen' (or something stronger) is the Funkhaus café bar in Broadcasting House, not far from the cathedral, where the 1950s-style decor includes photos from recording sessions in the West German Radio studios.

The theme of the Romanischer Sommer programme 2020 is 'Change of Perspective'; vocal ensembles taking part include the Calmus Ensemble; the new ensemble of

between items, lie on the floor or take time out for a Kölsch (the light local beer, a cross between lager and ale) and a snack in the beautiful cloister gardens. The music stops at midnight ... it is the perfect conclusion to a midsummer festival in a fascinating city. ■ *Romanischer Sommer 2020 is scheduled for 3-6 June – please check nearer the time.*

*Clare Stevens travelled to Cologne via Eurostar and Deutsche Bahn railways as a guest of the North Rhine-Westphalia International Visitors Programme. [nrw-kultur.de](http://nrw-kultur.de)*

*Art historian Dr Stefan Rath provides specialist guided tours of the city that include the 12 Romanesque churches: [stefanrath.com](http://stefanrath.com).*

*[romanischer-sommer.de](http://romanischer-sommer.de);  
[romanische-kirchen-koeln.de](http://romanische-kirchen-koeln.de);  
[cologne-tourism.com](http://cologne-tourism.com)*





*“ I heard the music and I saw it, too. I could see in my mind where every instrument was located. The recording transported me back to the actual performance. It was an amazing experience. ”*

**Marina Rebeka**

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CREATIONS



# RECITAL ROUND-UP

## ORGANS ONLINE

There are still ways to enjoy organ recitals from the comfort of your own home, although some live recitals are still scheduled.

At Salisbury (pictured) the Cathedral Organ Festival (see feature, p.22) will now open on 13 May with a digital concert performed by the home team; the planned performance of David Briggs playing his transcription of Mahler's Symphony no.2 will now take place on 23 September. Sunday music at Salisbury will go digital too, with short recitals on 17 May (John Challenger) and 7 June (David Halls) ([bit.ly/39g09H7](https://bit.ly/39g09H7)). Similarly, Cheltenham College is streaming its Lunchtime Live Organ Recitals for audiences to listen to online, with Alexander Ffinch's *Transformations* on 5 May and a performance from an unconfirmed organist on 2 June ([mixlr.com/cheltenham-college-music-dept](https://mixlr.com/cheltenham-college-music-dept)).

*At the time of writing, the following recitals were still in the diary as going ahead, but readers are strongly advised to check websites or telephone the numbers provided before attending.*



ASH MILLS

### Brighton, St Bartholomew's at 1.10pm

D'Arcy Trinkwon (26 May)  
01273 620491

### Brighton, The Meeting House, Univ. of Sussex at 12 noon

D'Arcy Trinkwon (27 May)  
01273 678 217

### Burton-upon-Trent, St Modwen at 12.30pm

David Butterworth (24 Jun)  
01332 552850

### Chelmsford Cathedral at 1pm

Adrian Gunning (1 May)  
020 72261218

### Chesterfield, St Mary and All Saints at 12 noon

David Butterworth (28 May)  
01246 206860

### Dursley, St James-the-Great at 11am

Nigel Davies (27 Jun) 01453 549280

### Edinburgh, Usher Hall at 1.10pm

John Kitchen (4 May) 0131 228 1155

### Leeds Town Hall at 11am\*

Christopher Stokes (30 May),  
Joshua Stephens (10 Jun, 5pm)  
0113 378 6600

### Liverpool Cathedral at 11.15am

Lee Ward (25 May) 0151 709 6271

### London EC3, St Michael's Cornhill at 1pm

Timothy Byram-Wigfield (4 May),  
Jordan Wong (11 May), Jonathan  
Rennert (18 May), Richard Gowers  
(1 Jun), Christopher Herrick (8 Jun),  
Laurence Long (15 Jun), Jeremiah  
Stephenson (22 Jun), Robert Jones  
(29 Jun) 07799 641 699

### London EC4, Temple Church at 1.15pm

James Norrey (6 May), Colin Walsh  
(13 May), Samuel Ali (20 May), Peter  
King (27 May), Charles Andrews  
(3 Jun), Theo van Wyk (10 Jun),  
Gabriele Marinoni (17 Jun), Sander  
van den Houten (24 Jun)  
020 7427 5650

### London N1, St John the Evangelist, Duncan Terrace at 7.30pm

Peter Wright (30 May), Jennifer Chow  
(27 Jun) 020 72261218

### London SW1, Westminster Cathedral at 7.30pm

John Butt (20 May), Andreas Sieling  
(17 Jun) 020 7798 9057

### London WC2, St-Martin-in-the-Fields at 1pm

Rupert Gough (8 May)  
020 7766 1136

### Norwich Cathedral at 11am

Ashley Grote (8 May), Martyn Rawles  
(25 May), George Incoe (17 Jun)  
01603 218306

### Oxford Town Hall at 12 noon

Anthony Hammond (27 May), Francis  
Rumsey (10 Jun) 01865 252195

### Portsmouth Cathedral at 1.10pm

Samuel Jones (14 May) 023 9282 3300

### Reading Minster at 12.30pm

Jonathan Holl (15 May) 0118 957 1057

### Reading Town Hall at 1pm

Jamie Rogers (18 May) 0118 960 6060

### Retford, St Swithun's at 1pm

David Butterworth (18 Jun)  
07850 833890

### St Albans Cathedral at 5.30pm

Martin Schmeding (16 May)  
01727 890290

### Warwick, Collegiate Church of St Mary at 1.15pm

Hans Uwe Hielscher (8 May), Lucy  
Morrell (15 May) 01926 403940  
(ext.3)

### Wells Cathedral at 1.05pm

Alexander Hamilton (4 Jun)  
01749 672773

### Windsor, St Mary's, Winkfield at 7.30pm

Jonathan Holl (6 Jun) 01344 886700

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A water engine, a new organ for Radley, and an 1885 Denman – welcome to the Nicholson workshop.

## JUDITH WEIR

Her choral music has been described as 'kaleidoscopes of colour'. Explore the Master of the Queen's Music's catalogue.

## PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Daniel Cook explores issues of performance practice in the organ sonatas of Irish composer Charles Villiers Stanford.

## PENNY FOR THE GUYS

How a group of men overturned the traditional image of the Welsh male voice choir.

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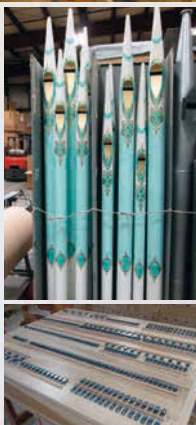
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## NEW DISCS COMING OUT IN... MAY/JUNE 2020



MITEO VALENTIN/ECM RECORDS

▲ The award-winning Estonian chamber choir Vox Clamantis present works by their fellow countryman Cyrillus Kreek

Throughout history, and around the world, cultural assertion has always been a key element in establishing a national identity. This frequently manifests itself musically in the form of folk dance rhythms and song melodies being incorporated into classical compositions. Just a few years before Estonia declared itself a republic in 1918, the young composer Cyrillus Kreek (1889-1962) had started to engage in folksong research – he was the first in his country to use a phonograph – and the

folksongs were to form the core of much of his choral output throughout his life.

Now ECM has released a CD entirely devoted to Kreek's choral miniatures, sung by the Estonian chamber choir Vox Clamantis under the director of Jaan-Eik Tulve. Recorded in Tallinn's Transfiguration Church, **The Suspended Harp of Babel** [ECM New Series 4819041] brings together a combination of sacred songs and folk music arranged by Kreek. The folk element is further underlined by the use of the

nyckelharpa and kannel (folk instruments similar, respectively, to a viol da gamba and a zither).

Other choral releases include Tim Reader conducting the Epiphoni Consort in the choral works of Owain Park: the core of **When Love Speaks** [Delphian DCD 34239] is two Shakespeare cycles, of love songs and 'songs of night-time'. And turning the clock back half a millennium, from Linn Records comes **John Sheppard: Media vita** [Linn CKD 329] with the choir of New College, Oxford, under Robert Quinney.

Close ties between the Dutch Reformed Church and Calvin gave rise to a tradition of organ improvisations on Geneva psalms that were used for meditation immediately before or after a service. Sietze de Vries, whose series of CDs inspired by these psalms has already taken him to historic organs in Elspeet, Leeuwarden and the Hague, now presents the fourth volume on the famous Müller organ of Haarlem's Bavokerk: **Geneefse Psalmen IV** [JSBH 280619]. It includes an *hommage* to Dutch organist Klaas Bolt (d.1990), who was noted for his improvisations on hymn tunes. ■

### CHORAL CDS

#### Cantos Sagrados

National Youth Choir of Scotland, Royal Scottish National Orch/Bell Signum Classics SIGCD 604

#### Distler, Zimmermann: Wohl uns des feinen Herren – Sacred choir and organ music

Norddeutscher Kammerchor, Arvid Gast (org)/Jürgensen MDG 906 2156-6

#### Frohloket, ihr Völker auf Erden

Isura Madrigal Chor/Buxbaum Querstand VKJK 1904

#### Howells: Missa Sabrinensis

Bach Choir, BBC Concert Orch/Hill Hyperion CDA 68294

#### Kreek: The Suspended Harp of Babel

Vox Clamantis/Tulve ECM New Series 4819041

#### Ben Parry: The Hours

Choir of Royal Holloway/Gough Signum Classics SIGCD 629

#### Saint Louis Premieres

Saint Louis Chamber Chorus/Barnes Regent Records REGCD 541

#### John Sheppard: Media vita

Choir of New College, Oxford/Quinney Linn Records CKD 632

#### Sleeper's Prayer: Choral music from North America

Choir of Merton College, Oxford/Nicholas Delphian DCD 34232

#### Owain Park: When Love Speaks

Epiphoni Consort/Reader Delphian DCD 34239

### ORGAN CDS

#### Alain: Trois Danses et al.

Christophe Mantoux, Cavaillé-Coll organ (1890), St-Ouen, Rouen Raven OAR-163

#### J.S. Bach: Complete Organ Works vol.14 (digital only)

David Goode, Metzler organ, Trinity College Chapel, Cambridge Signum Classics SIGCD 814

#### Bach, Mendelssohn, Liszt

Michael Schönheit, Wäldner organ, Halle Cathedral Querstand VKJK 1910

#### Berlin!

Andreas Sieling, Sauer organ, Berlin Cathedral MDG 946 2161-6

#### Dvořák: From the New World

Markus & Pascal Kaufmann, Kern organ, Dresden Frauenkirche Querstand VKJK 1908

#### Bill Evans: On the Organ

David Schollmeyer, Beckerath organ, Große Kirche, Bremerhaven MDG 906 2159-6

#### Froberger: Complete Fantasias & Canzonas

Terence Charlston, Andreas Hermet clavichord (2009), Berlin Divine Art DDA 25204

#### Geneefse Psalmen IV

Sietze de Vries, Müller organ, Bavokerk, Haarlem JSB Records JSBH 280619

#### Johann-Ernst-Hähnel-Organ

Krysztof Urbaniak, Hähnel organ, Krippenhna Querstand VKJK 1911

#### Liszt: Complete Organ Works vol.1

Zuzana Ferjenčíková, Alois-Mooser organ, Fribourg Cathedral MDG 906 2140-6

#### Persichetti: Organ Music

Tom Winpenny Toccata Classics TOCC 0549

#### Reger: Works for Organ

Irénee Peyrot, Schuke organ, Marktkirche Unser Lieben Frauen, Halle Querstand VKJK 1913

#### Sigrid's Unbeaten Tracks

Graham Barber, Link organ, Pauluskirche, Ulm Fugue State Films FSRCD 016

#### Symphonic Splendor

Peter Richard Conte, Wanamaker organ, Philadelphia/Milanov Raven OAR-159



# REVIEWS

Rating: ★★★★★ Highly recommended ★★★★★ Very good ★★★ Good ★★ Average ★ Poor



## THIS ISSUE'S REVIEWERS

**Early Music Editor**  
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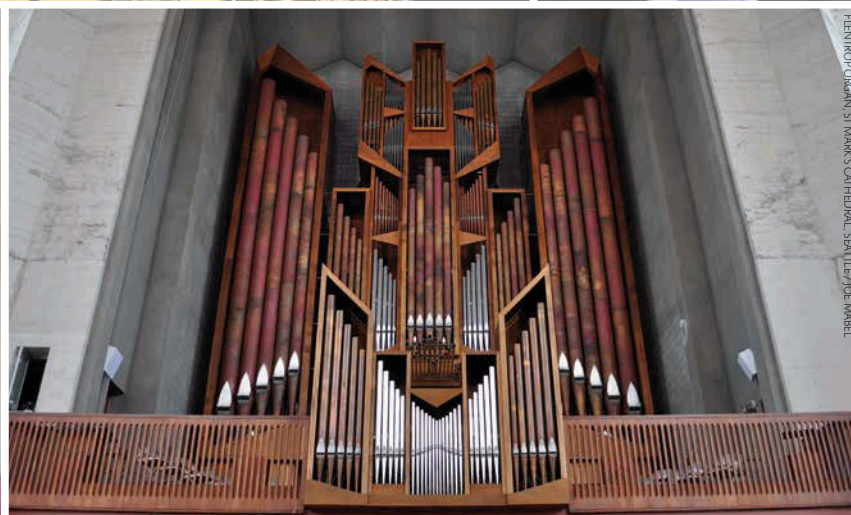
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## KEYBOARD CDS

**Pictures at an Exhibition**

Martin Baker, Ruffatti organ,  
Buckfast Abbey

Ad fontes AF-001 [74:17]

★★★★★



The first CD release from Buckfast Abbey's new record label

looks good – by which I mean the kind of packaging that could grace any coffee table. The embossed hardback book reveals a wealth of detail and images regarding the new Ruffatti organ at the Abbey. On the disc itself is some of the repertoire from the opening recital given by Martin Baker. The Mussorgsky 'Pictures' provide ample opportunities to show off the wealth of aural effects from this instrument, while the Bach Passacaglia fares equally well, displaying some of the Italianate chorus-work. Baker is on top form on this recording, and the widely distributed divisions of the organ are brought together brilliantly by engineer David Hinit.

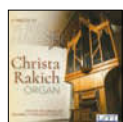
RUPERT GOUGH

**A Tribute to Yuko Hayashi**

Christa Rakich, Richards, Fowkes organ (2008), Duke University Seminary Chapel; Wendy Rolfe (fl)

Loft LRCD 1139 [74:56]

★★★★★



Yuko Hayashi (1929-2018) – for many years the influential

professor of organ at the New England Conservatory – is honoured in fine style here by former pupil Christa Rakich, now visiting professor at Oberlin. The disc opens, however, in less than convincing fashion, the opening bars of BWV 534/1 rather unsteady on

their feet. Generally, Rakich's rhythmic expressiveness in the Prelude feels overdone, the impact of the diminished seventh at bar 70 greatly reduced by the *ritardando* which precedes it. In the Fugue, on the other hand, Rakich's flirting with the boundaries of agogic plausibility for me works brilliantly, though others will disagree. Elsewhere, Klaas Bolt's lovely improvised variations on *Ontwaak, gij die slaapt* from a timeless recording made in Zandvoort in 1982 feels oddly displaced but shows off the colours of the organ fittingly. The W.T. Best transcription of Mendelssohn's Prelude & Fugue in E minor is a wholly convincing addition to the organ repertoire, while James Woodman's *Extravagance of Toccatas* (2012) evokes three such pieces from different style-periods. The Richards, Fowkes organ at Duke (II/30) is a masterpiece: deeply and splendidly musical, the ear perpetually engaged.

CHRIS BRAGG

**Poetic Visions**

Felix Hell, Walcker organ (1902), Christuskirche, Lüdenscheid  
MSR Classics 1694 [75:27]

★★★



The American-educated German concert organist Felix Hell here

performs a collection of German romantic works on the characteristic Walcker organ at Lüdenscheid. Pride of place goes to Rheinberger's *Twelve Character Pieces*, op.156. Perhaps Rheinberger's strength as a composer lay more in short forms than in extended essays; these attractive and varied miniatures seem to suggest so. Mendelssohn's oft-played Sixth

Sonata receives a nuanced performance even if the *crescendo* in the fugue seems at odds with the rest of Hell's straightforwardly classical approach. Elsewhere, Liszt's 'BACH' Prelude feels occasionally rushed (and the wind wobbles alarmingly when the left hand plays in octaves), while the 'Langsam' in Brahms's Fugue in A flat minor is somewhat less slow than you might be used to – it feels a little restless, even if the instinct for line and direction is surely a good one. The organ retained its electro-pneumatic action from an ill-fated 1957 rebuild when restored in 2008. It sounds wholly convincing in this repertoire, although noisily opening pallets distract slightly in softer passages.

CHRIS BRAGG

**Abendlied**

Stéphane Bois, Link organ, Mirepoix Cathedral; Camille Scavelli (s), Marie Nonon (vn)  
Priory Records PRCD 1211 [70:56]

★★★★★



The rarely recorded III/40 Link organ of Mirepoix

Cathedral merits greater exposure on disc if this quietly ravishing survey of German romantic songs to and of the night is any guide to its attractively liquid and lyrical voice. The Cathedral's head organist, Stéphane Bois, proves an eloquent advocate for both the instrument and an intelligently chosen programme of evocative pieces by Reger, Karg-Elert and Brahms, ranging from hushed contemplation to the meltingly beautiful and stirringly dramatic. There is sympathetic support from soprano Camille Scavelli and violinist Marie Nonon,

framed alongside Bois, in Mirepoix's enveloping acoustics. In a word: sublime.

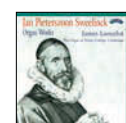
MICHAEL QUINN

**Jan Pieterszoon****Sweelinck: Organ Works**

James Lancelot, Metzler organ (1975), Trinity College, Cambridge

Priory PRCD 1228 [72:50]

★★★



This selection focuses on pieces most likely written down for organ,

rather than harpsichord, played and numbered (I think) from the Leonhardt edition, but a concordance with other editions and some SwWV numbers would have been helpful. The toccatas, fantasias, Psalm 116 and the variations on 'Allein Gott', are played cleanly and 'in time', but ornamentation is not added (suggested by Sweelinck's links with the English virginalists, especially Bull and Philips) and this organ is really designed for later music, so the 17th-century character of Sweelinck's mean-tone soundworld is hardly evident. Efficiently played, but there is scope for more stylistic imagination.

DAVID PONSFORD

**The Complete Organ Works of Sir William Harris**

Daniel Cook, Durham Cathedral (Willis, 1876; Harrison & Harrison, 1905-2001)  
Priory PRCD 1187 (2CDs)

[76:34; 72:14]

★★★★★



Having recorded the complete organ works of

Stanford, Brewer, Sumsion, Dyson and Alcock, Daniel Cook is a fine advocate of Harris's music. As organist at

St George's, Windsor Castle from 1933 to 1961, Harris was a prolific improviser within an Edwardian harmonic language developed from Wagner, Stanford and Parry, which suited contemporary English liturgical and aesthetic mores. Most pieces are short: processions, meditations, elegies, voluntaries, etc, but the fantasies on traditional melodies and the one sonata are larger in scale. Harrison & Harrison's 'flagship' cathedral organ is ideal – a perfect vehicle for this music, and John Henderson's notes are particularly interesting.

DAVID PONSFORD

### Decker Plays Decker vol.5

Pamela Decker, Douglas Cleveland and Edward Landin Senn, Flentrop organ, Saint Mark's Cathedral, Seattle  
Loft Recordings LRCD-1167  
[58:08]

★★★★★



This fifth volume of Pamela Decker performing her own music includes four first recordings. Of primary interest is the nine-movement *The Seven Last Words and Triumph of Christ*. Composed in 2018 and played by Douglas Cleveland, it makes much of Seattle's characterful, well-resourced IV/58 Flentrop organ to move eloquently between contemplative poetry and powerful drama. Cleveland's gentle account of *Meditation* (2005) – a birthday tribute by Decker's husband, Ken Yuki – is touchingly lyrical. Decker provides an authoritative traversal of the Duruflé-accented *Fantasy on the Name of Roy Andrew Jackson* (2015). The multi-faceted *Praeludium* is vividly realised by Edward Landin Senn, who commissioned it in 2016.

MICHAEL QUINN

### Giles Swayne: Stations of the Cross

Simon Niemiński, Matthew Copley organ (2007), St Mary's Metropolitan Cathedral, Edinburgh

Resonus RES 10118 [60:28]

★★★★★



Like many, I suspect, my knowledge of Giles Swayne's organ output was limited to the well-known *Riff-Raff*. Writing more than 20 years later, this set of Stations of the Cross, inspired by Eric Gill's reliefs at Westminster Cathedral, has little in common with that earlier work, save perhaps a brief ostinato in the movement depicting 'The Women of Jerusalem'. In its visceral rawness, Swayne is (too?) keen to impress on his listener his own atheistic position and to stress the purely human narrative. In terms of evocative gesture and the way in

which Swayne devises his own modes, the music of his teacher Messiaen, stripped of its deeply imbued Catholic mystery, hovers in the background. But drama and violent contrast aside, this music leaves quite a different impression. It seems to me at its best when at its most organ-centric; the trio in 'Simon of Cyrene', and the concluding Prelude & Fugue ('Jesus' body is laid in the tomb'). As one would expect, Simon Niemiński plays this hugely difficult score brilliantly. The organ at Edinburgh's RC Cathedral – here portrayed as a new instrument, ignoring the large quantities of recycled pipework from Wilkinson's 1882 *magnum opus* at Preston Public Hall – is often harsh, unattractive and brutal in its modest space. In a sense, then, not entirely inappropriate to this challenging score: the listener isn't meant to get comfortable.

CHRIS BRAGG

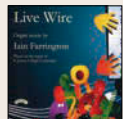
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### Live Wire

Iain Farrington, Mander organ, St John's College, Cambridge  
Priority Records PRCD 1218 [76:55]

★★★★★



Strap yourself in for an exhausting but hugely entertaining rollercoaster ride through recent pieces by Iain Farrington. With the composer himself on performing duties, it's a recital of adrenalised, knockabout energy, animated humour and startling colours shifting between stained glass delicacy and neon-bright delirium. Variety is king here: the exuberant title track (2008) is a deft marriage of improvisatory, jazz and baroque ritornello,

### Adrenalised, knockabout energy

while *Fiesta!* (2003) channels Stravinsky at his most rhythmically vital and unpredictably variegated. The ten miniature caricatures of *Animal Parade* (2007) – complete with a wickedly dyspeptic depiction of 'Critics' – is a hallucinogenic Disney film, *Free Wheeler* (2014) a dizzying jazz-swing Big Band in perpetual motion, and *Lay My Burden Down* (2017) adroitly drawing on African-American spirituals.

MICHAEL QUINN

◀ Iain Quinn provides an 'entertaining rollercoaster ride'



◀ **Stations of the Cross**

McNeil Robinson, Aeolian-Skinner organ, St Mary the Virgin, New York City  
Delos DE 3549 [73:03]

★★★★★



This disc pays homage to McNeil Robinson, renowned New

York organist, composer and improviser who died in 2015. It was his final wish that a recording of his improvisations on the 14 Stations of the Cross be made available. This remarkable concert took place in 2006 at St Mary the Virgin, Park Avenue, where Robinson served as organist from 1964-82. The improvisations are based on themes provided by Ned Rorem with the occasional strand of 'Pange lingua'. Robinson's harmonic language is clearly indebted to Dupré and Messiaen, yet these personal interpretations of the unfolding Passion story deliver a clear and imaginative narrative full of colourful contrasts. The Aeolian-Skinner organ sounds glorious on this recording too.

RUPERT GOUGH

**Symphonic Acclamations & Gregorian Paraphrases**

Matthieu de Miguel, Puget organ (1888), Notre-Dame de la Dalbade, Toulouse  
Priory PRCD 1210 [73:32]

★★★★★



Widor played the inaugural recital on this effective romantic organ, restored in 2009 by Gérard Bancell and Denis Lacorre. Chromaticism and Brucknerian scope characterise the Final from his Seventh Symphony. This is followed by an interesting selection of pieces by Langlais, Fleury, Tournemire and

Grunenwald, in which Gregorian themes combine with a rich harmonic language. Matthieu de Miguel evokes an enormous palette of organ colour and dynamics with an unerring sense of dramatic rhetoric, which makes a tremendously effective recording. With a perfect match between music and organ in generous acoustics, and with ample liner notes, this is a brilliant recording.

DAVID PONSFORD

**Weckmann: Complete Organ Music**

Matteo Venturini, Dell'Orto & Lanzini organ, Our Lady of Fatima Parish Church, Pinerolo, Italy  
Brilliant Classics 95229 (3CDs)  
[60:50; 63:38; 60:03]

★★★★★



With this new triple disc compilation of the complete organ

music of Matthias Weckmann (1616-74), Matteo Venturini helps us to appreciate the huge significance of this composer on the establishment of the north German organ school, as well as the beauty and inventiveness of his writing. In his organ works, Weckmann achieves a marriage of styles between the Italian-influenced music of Heinrich Schütz and the contrapuntal complexity and refinement of the Dutch keyboard school from Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck. For this recording, Venturini sensibly interleaves the shorter toccatas, canzonas and preludes between the larger chorale fantasies. In the case of the Lutheran chorale 'Es ist das Heil uns kommen her' and the Ambrosian hymn 'O lux beata trinitas', these are monumental sets of variations, each containing elaboration on verses

lasting over 30 minutes. The organ for this recording (completed in 2011 by the builders Dell'Orto & Lanzini) is based strictly on the work of Arp Schnitger and convincingly helps the listener step back into the early baroque soundworld. There is no shortage of characterful sounds for Venturini to draw on, and his fine performances embrace Weckmann's different styles with grace, conviction, occasional humour and virtuosity aplenty.

RUPERT GOUGH

**CHORAL CDS****Parry: Judith**

Sarah Fox (s), Kathryn Rudge (m-s), Toby Spence (t), Henry Waddington (b-bar), Crouch End Festival Chorus, London Mozart Players / William Vann (dir)  
Chandos CHSA 5268(2) (2CDs)  
[61:40; 69:32]

★★★★★



Though well-received at its 1888 premiere in Birmingham,

Parry's *Judith* fell from favour during the last century, overshadowed not least by Elgar's *Gerontius*. Freer of the influence of Wagner than Elgar's oratorio, *Judith* surely owes a debt to *Elijah*. The one number you're bound to recognise is the aria 'Dear Lord and Father of Mankind' – better known as a hymn ('Repton'). This is *Judith*'s first recording, made in the wake of a rare outing in 2019 in the Royal Festival Hall with the same forces. On the evidence of these CDs, conductor William Vann totally believes in this piece; he offers a compelling reading, drawing from the excellent Crouch End Festival Chorus and LMP (all of whom would have

been new to the piece) a thrilling account. The soloists are all on fine form, with Sarah Fox in the title role singing with burnished tones, and Toby Spence as the conflicted king exploiting his ringing top register.

PHILIP REED

**Sleeper's Prayer: Choral Music from North America**

Choir and Choristers of Merton College, Oxford, Alex Little, Tom Fetherstonhaugh (org), Claire Wickes (fl), Merton Brass / Benjamin Nicholas (dir, org)  
Delphian DCD 34232 [63:35]

★★★★★



Merton's new choral foundation aimed to combine tradition with bold

innovation and they pull that off here with some daring. The programme alternates post-minimalist work by David Lang with more familiarly Anglican material by another contemporary Nico Muhly, including the wonderful *The Revd Mustard His Installation Prelude*, written for a London friend. There's another Muhly organ piece but the surprise of the set is an arrangement for organ of the Conclusion to Act 3 of Philip Glass's *Satyagraha*, which sits very logically within Lang's soundworld and serves as a wonderful pediment to his *sleeper's prayer*, a stark, self-written version of the American childhood 'Now I lay me down to sleep' prayer, but done with chastened maturity. The Merton singers are in great voice and Merton Brass could dep for the angels. The set includes a work apiece by Libby Larsen, Abbie Betinis, Stephen Paulus and an arrangement by Gerre Hancock, but these feel like makeweights.

BRIAN MORTON

### Salve, Salve, Salve – Josquin's Spanish Legacy

Contrapunctus / Owen Rees (dir)

Signum Classics SIGCD 608

[71:02]

★★★★★



Paradoxically, the cool resonance that gilds the glorious voices of

Contrapunctus transmits the incandescence of spiritual fervour in this thoughtful selection of works by Victoria, Guerrero and Morales. Victoria's *Missa 'Gaudeamus'*, a parody of Morales, radiates with clarity and liveliness of tone. Particularly noteworthy are sopranos who combine purity and genuine vocal release to perfection. This small ensemble offers sinuously shaped, elegant, seemingly infinitely sustained lines with wonderful internal dialogues, all sensitively balanced with well-judged tempo contrasts, drawing the listener in and captivating ears and emotions.

REBECCA TAVENER

### Juan Esquivel: Missa Hortus conclusus

De Profundis / Eamonn Dougan (dir)

Hyperion CDA 68326 [69:29]

★★★★★



This majestically sonorous, large, low-voice ensemble is ideal

for Esquivel's *stile antico* devotional delights in an enthralling programme of Marian antiphons and motets, framing the composer's final Mass, a parody based on the elegant title motet by Rodrigo de Ceballos. Glowing with emotional insight, vocal colour, and oodles of dynamic and tempo variations held within the bounds of taste, these tenderly

solemn and revelatory performances offer nobility of pace and spiritual heft. Fascinating liner notes from Bruno Turner enhance a fine exhibition of works from a composer deserving of greater fame.

REBECCA TAVENER

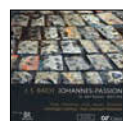
### J.S. Bach: Johannes-Passion

Elizabeth Watts (s), Benno Schachtner (a), Patrick Grahl (t, Evangelist), Peter Harvey (b, Jesus), Matthias Winckhler (b-bar, Pilate), Gaechinger Cantorey / Hans-Christoph Rademann (dir)

Carus 83.313 (2CDs)

[59:25; 48:38]

★★★★★



This is a very clean, clear, straightforward account of the

*St John Passion* in Bach's final version of 1749. That means it is basically the version we are most familiar with; but in three cases – the soprano aria with two flutes (no.9), the bass arioso (no.19) and the tenor aria (no.20) – different texts are employed to the same music, and there is some slightly modified instrumentation. This probably only matters to the most ardent Bachian, but the changes of instrumentation, notably the introduction of a *bassono grosso* (a baroque contrabassoon), do make a difference. With excellent soloists, a fine small choir and period ensemble, Rademann directs a typically secure and enjoyable account, recorded after a performance at the 2019 Ansbach Bach Festival. The only real drawback is that occasionally the drama of Bach's structure fails to move quickly enough between numbers.

PHILIP REED

### Cantos Sagrados (MacMillan, Whitacre, Musgrave, Ešenvalds, Tippett, Biebl)

National Youth Choir of Scotland, Royal Scottish National Orchestra / Christopher Bell (dir)

Signum Classics SIGCD 604

[64:06]

★★★★★



Taking its name from James MacMillan's *Cantos Sagrados*,

this accomplished album from the National Youth Choir of Scotland is a joy from start to finish. Not only does it showcase some contemporary choral classics – Tippett's *A Child of*

*Our Time* spirituals, Ešenvalds's *Amazing Grace* and Whitacre's *When David Heard* and *Leonardo Dreams of His Flying Machine* – but it also includes Musgrave's engaging but too-little known *On the Underground, Set 2: The Strange and the Exotic*. Christopher Bell's beautifully assembled programme is completed by Biebl's attractive setting of the *Ave Maria*. In addition to their impeccable tuning, vocal balance and tone quality, you can hear the enthusiasm the NYCOS have for this music and the sheer pleasure they take in sharing it with us.

PHILIP REED

▷

### Fading

The Gesualdo Six / Owain Park (dir)

Hyperion CDA 68285 [64:06]

★★★★★



Beginning with Compline and Thomas Tallis's night prayer *Te lucis ante terminum*, this beautifully themed and beautifully sung set takes us from twilight into darkness and then into the returning day and the continuation of the Holy Office. Combining Tallis and Gesualdo with modern/contemporary composers such as Sarah Rinkus, Gerda Blok-Wilson and the late Veljo Tormis can be tricky for an ensemble, but the Gesualdo Six and Owain Park are fearless and have shaped a programme that almost plays out as a composed sequence. The singing is impeccable, with plosive consonants perfectly placed in unison. A wonderful recording.

BRIAN MORTON

▼ 'Fearless': the Gesualdo Six



ASH MALLS



## EARLY MUSIC



## Rebecca Tavener rounds up the latest releases

All but one of these recordings features a one-to-a-part vocal consort. Let's begin with some Holy Week programmes: The four gentlemen of New York Polyphony include works by Guerrero and Escobar in **Francisco de Peñalosa: Lamentationes** [BIS 2407], an SACD recording which also includes some sections of that composer's *Missa 'L'Homme armé'*. They combine superbly emotional interpretations with spiritual depth, and their beautiful voices are wondrously balanced in ideal acoustics. One can only marvel at their graceful phrasing and total immersion in this undeservedly lesser-known material. For more male voice exploration of repertoire for the Triduum, look no further than **Palestrina: Lamentations** [Hyperion CDA 68284], a complete performance of Book 2 from Cinquecento, offering gloriously sustained lines. Voices of technical accomplishment and individual character combine to great effect with understanding and appreciation of the texts characterising their personal and personable singing. Palestrina's works concerning the Last Supper, the Blessed Sacrament and the Crucifixion feature in **Palestrina: Volume 8** [Coro COR 16175] from The Sixteen, the only choir in this selection. The grand, rarely heard, 8-voice *Missa 'Fratres ego enim accipi'* (for Corpus Christi or Holy Week) is welcome and impressive but three Song of Songs motets, albeit allegorical, make surprising (and inappropriate?) bedfellows. As for the performance, high standards are consistently maintained.

If Palestrina's 'Song of Songs' was his tongue-in-cheek atonement for writing madrigals in his youth, he was not a natural when it came to secular music, unlike the great Orlando di Lasso. Lasso's

▼ Cinquecento offer 'gloriously sustained lines' in Palestrina's Lamentations

Psalms, however, are utterly devout: seven penitential psalms plus *Laudes Domino* fill a double-CD, **Psalmus** [cpo 555 264-2], from Die Singphoniker, a consort of gentlemen with occasional guest soprano. Their soft-toned voices cast a veil over even the most urgent of orations, and occasional lapses in style and intonation detract only mildly from a carefully introspective performance. Both Masses and madrigals flowed easily from the pen of Cipriano da Rore, and another German male-voice group, Weser-Renaissance, seeks to impress with **Missa 'Vivat Felix Hercules' Motets** [cpo 777 989-2]. Duke Ercole II d'Este of Ferrara is celebrated in this work based on a masterwork by Josquin, the *Missa 'Hercules Dux Ferrariae'*, dedicated to his grandfather Ercole I. It's clever stuff, but this accomplished but not entirely blemish-free singing, recorded with clarity, feels detached in edgy acoustics. Recorded in 2015 for the composer's 450th anniversary, it has only just been released. For

## Superbly emotional interpretations

the secular Rore, here comes a double-CD of his madrigals from the American consort Blue Heron on their own label, **I madrigali a cinque voci** [BHCD 1009]. The six bright-toned singers, variously employed, are directed externally by Scott Metcalf. They form expressive ensembles, but might there have been even more intensity, emotion, and personality if directed from within by a singer? In intimate acoustics with the perfect touch of bloom, some of these interpretations feel a tad safe and they suffer some minor intonation difficulties. Daringly, they have employed a reader (the excellent Alessandro Quarta) to declaim the text in Italian before each madrigal, making this truly a recording for the cognoscenti.

*Rebecca Tavener is a singer and director specialising in early and contemporary music. She is founder-director of Canty, Scotland's only professional medieval music group.*



THERESA PEVAL

### ◀ **Singing in Secret – Clandestine Catholic music by William Byrd**

The Marian Consort / Rory McCleery (dir)

Delphian DCD 34230 [60:14]

★★★★★



Perhaps the ideal consort for this repertoire, the Marians bring an intimate, individually passionate flavour to Byrd's Latin works. Nimble, lively vocal colour, warmth in the soprano (all too rare among UK groups) and word appreciation are core characteristics of this finely honed ensemble. They revel in a neatly devised programme as sections of the Mass for Four voices, interleaved with Propers for All Saints, culminate in an urgent reading of *Infelix ego* – from the first entry they make it personal. The recording hardly feels clandestine, with an acoustic glow probably denied to truly secret liturgies but most pleasing to our modern ears.

REBECCA TAVENER

### **The Call of Rome (Victoria, Josquin, F. Anerio, Allegri)**

The Sixteen / Harry Christophers (dir)

Coro COR 16178 [72:45]

★★★★★



Harry Christophers and The Sixteen's annual Choral Pilgrimage – amazingly, 2020 marks the pilgrimage's 20th anniversary – is one of the abiding joys of the UK's choral scene, the concerts eagerly awaited by audiences. The accompanying CD is equally something of an annual highlight and this year's offering, a rich programme of renaissance polyphony, does not disappoint.

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With Allegri's celebrated *Miserere* at its heart, all of the admirable qualities we have come to expect from The Sixteen are on display in spades – just sample the *Tenebrae Responsories for Holy Saturday* by Victoria. Christophers has assembled a satisfying programme of music for the Catholic Church, which is then beautifully executed by him and his hand-picked group of singers.

PHILIP REED

### **Antonín Reicha: Requiem**

Emöke Baráth (s), Markéta Cukrová (m-s), Krystian Adam (t), Tomáš Šelc (b), L'Armonia Vocale, L'Armonia Terrena / Zdeněk Klauđa (dir)

Nibiru 01662231 [55:44]

★★★



A recent piano CD series was entitled *Reicha Rediscovered*,

which neatly reflected the shambolic nature of the legacy. Reicha resisted publishing his work and the opus numbers subsequently assigned are a muddle. He started the Requiem in Vienna, where he had studied with Salieri and Albrechtsberger, and resumed it some time later when settled in France, in line with his theoretical interest in doubling choral and vocal lines with instrumental sections. It is seen as the link between Mozart's Requiem and Berlioz's *Grande messe des morts*, and like the latter was not intended for liturgical purposes. Properly reconstructed in the 1980s by Stanislav Ondráček, revised by Amy Goodman, it still has no developed performance or recording history, but Klauđa's forces seem undeterred and deliver a suitably plain articulation of the Latin text, with excellent solo parts and

tightly controlled orchestral accompaniment.

BRIAN MORTON

### **HUSH! Songs sacred and profane, tender, consoling, witty, urbane**

Papagena

SOMM Recordings

SOMMCD 0608 [65:40]

★★★★★



Each of the five very strong female voices in this accomplished

professional consort is full of character, yet they blend perfectly when required in a sequence of immaculate performances of repertoire from a very wide range of cultures and traditions, from Hildegard of Bingen and Scarlatti to Guns N' Roses, David Lang and Libby Larsen. Whether singing in Georgian, Russian, Church Slavonic, Bulgarian, Latin, Yiddish or English, Papagena brings a bright, focused sound, bell-like tuning and carefully sculpted phrasing to every piece. Highly recommended.

CLARE STEVENS

### **Blessing: The Music of Paul Mealor**

Voce, Stephen Scarlato (org, pno) / Mark Singleton (dir)

Signum Records SIGCD 613

[73:34]

★★★★★



It is hard to bring a fresh approach to 'Let all the World in Every Corner Sing' so famously set by Vaughan Williams, but Paul Mealor has done so in the first track of this recording (after a punchy first verse he inserts part of Psalm 150 to create a contemplative second, featuring a limpid soprano solo, and then surrounds verse three with pealing bells). He also

presents 'In the bleak midwinter' in an appealing new guise as the last of three Christina Rossetti settings; and other settings of familiar texts are equally convincing. Many of these works reflect the romantic, emotional style people expect when they commission Mealor, full of beautiful solo lines and ethereal soprano sound, sensitively delivered by the young Voce Chamber Choir of New England. I loved the music, which stands up well to anthologising; an Evening Service for Selwyn College, Cambridge was a particular highlight, as was an intriguing sequence of three Shakespeare texts, 'Let Fall the Windows of Mine Eyes'. I was less happy with the recording quality, which meant that I needed headphones to hear the quiet passages properly and even then I was constantly adjusting the volume control.

CLARE STEVENS

### **Messiah ... Refreshed**

Penelope Shumate (s), Claudia Chapa (m-s), John McVeigh (t), Christopher Job (bar), The Jonathan Griffith Singers, National Youth Choir of Great Britain, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra / Jonathan Griffith (dir)

Signum Records SIGCD 610

[134:13]



Listening to the first section of the familiar Sinfonia in this edition

prepared by Eugène Goossens and Thomas Beecham transported me to the world of Walt Disney's Stokowski-conducted *Fantasia*. It's a shock at first, now that we are so used to historically informed baroque-style performances, but the re-orchestration is fascinating. The interesting story >



◀ of the 1959 score and its famous recording (with the RPO, as here) and single contemporary performance is told in the liner booklet. There is some 'smudgy' choral singing from a combination of an international adult choir and members of the National Youth Choir of Great Britain; and an unfocused first entry from the tenor was an indication of solo contributions to come from him and his three colleagues that were not at all to my taste. Maybe I'm just too closely wedded to the precise tuning and timing that is now the norm for *Messiah* performances.

CLARE STEVENS

## DVDS

### Monteverdi: *Vespro della Beata Vergine*

Pygmalion / Raphaël Pichon (dir)  
Chateau de Versailles CVS 018  
[117:00]

★★★



Lavishly produced and recorded live in the Chapelle Royale, lit by celebrated designer Bertrand Couderc

to suggest a crepuscular byzantine location, the use of the building is impressive, with a candlelit opening procession and appropriate placement of performers in galleries. There's a limit to how much Versailles's baroque architectural fripperies can be disguised, however, and their influence prances into Raphaël Pichon's interpretation with a pride in keeping with the lair of the Sun King. Risible text on the reverse of the case gushes the oft-repeated fake news that Monteverdi conceived this both as a defined 'work' (wrong) and for San Marco in Venice (also

wrong), calling Monteverdi's compositional innovations 'the height of the baroque' (most wrong). Pichon selects the usual subjects from Monteverdi's anthology, opting for the largest possible scorings for his Vespers sequence and, to his credit, includes antiphons. These are measured to fit the tactus of each Psalm (interesting) but sung by soloists whose words are often unclear: with no texts in the booklet and the less-than-poetic subtitles missing altogether for the antiphons, this leaves the listener in the dark and also in no doubt that this interpretation is not concerned with liturgical probity. Moreover, with cavalier theatricality, the opening Versicle & Response 'Deus in adiutorium' is reprised at the end.

The increasingly devout Monteverdi of 1610 might well recoil at this egocentric, overblown, romantic treatment, but there's good news: the many instrumentalists are superb, the scoring options imaginative, and there's some technically wonderful singing from eight magnificent soloists plus compelling eruptions from a volcanic chorus. Pairs of tenors and basses compete, exuding enough testosterone to provoke a small war, hurling their viscera at the audience in a manner only enabled by a live event with no chance that they will be summoned back by a producer to do it all again. They might learn from Isobel Baillie's maxim 'never sing louder than lovely'. Tenor Zachary Wilder maintains elegance within the bounds of good taste, and Lucile Richardot, a mezzo of scarily imperious stage-presence and possessed of a kaleidoscope of vocal colour, prodigiously impresses by default – high-baroque opera might be her true *métier*.

Pichon stretches his tempi in all directions like elastic pizza dough, but the gluten loses its virtue by the time we reach a jaded Magnificat. People seem to enjoy being bludgeoned by grandiosity, however, and this luxurious production will surely sell like 'les tartes chaudes': after all, as Oscar Wilde put it, 'Moderation is a fatal thing. Nothing succeeds like excess.'

REBECCA TAVENER

## ORGAN MUSIC

### Matthew Martin: *St Albans Triptych*

Novello MUSNOV 100454,  
£10.99

### Judith Weir: *The Trees Unfold*

Novello MUSCH 88055, £6.99

### Hugo Distler: *Complete Organ Works vol.4*

Armin Schoof (ed.)  
Bärenreiter BA 9234, £28.50

### Albert L. Travis: *Variations on 'Hyfrydol'*

Morning Star, US\$11.00

Matthew Martin composed his substantial (10 minutes) *St Albans Triptych* as a test piece for the St Albans Festival, and it shows – it's pretty testing, and must have been a daunting prospect under competition conditions for the players concerned. Considerable agility and stamina are required in every department here. Its construction is admirably rigorous – a six-note motif is used to generate melody and harmony through various transformations – and its three movements (Introduction with Dances, Intermezzo, and Fugue) explore a wide range

of faultlessly idiomatic and transparently-scored textures. And, hallelujah, there's real counterpoint in the Fugue, which calls for immaculate control of some extremely complex articulation. It's all vivid and arresting, reasonably challenging for the listener, and players with the requisite technical equipment should have no hesitation whatever in adding this to their repertoire. A large instrument is really needed to give the necessary sense of sonic contrast and drama.

Judith Weir's short work *The Trees Unfold* – a further welcome addition to her steadily growing corpus of organ music – is a far less demanding proposition, but no less thoughtfully composed. Commissioned as part of a tribute to the Edinburgh organist Philip Sawyer, it calls for two manuals and pedals, and a very modest level of pedal technique. Much of the work is concerned with the juxtaposition of individual chords – often triadic – but there are occasional flowerings into more fluid and lyrical writing, with the work as a whole growing from a sparse and staccato opening to



something much more luxuriant and chordal; an aural metaphor for the spring flowering which inspired the work.

Textures are characteristically inventive, sometimes quirky, and faultlessly conceived, and the work is an invaluable addition to the growing body of contemporary organ music which doesn't require a superhuman technique to perform.

### Complete Organ Works

**vol.4** – the last of the Bärenreiter complete survey of Distler's organ music – presents a longer version of a work (the partita 'Jesus Christus unser Heiland') already published in a shorter form in an earlier volume. In the present volume the piece comprises choral, eight variations, and *ricercar*. The music is, as always, impeccably written, meticulous and elegant, and the editorial standards offer the same experience, with full and informative notes and beautifully reproduced facsimiles. Austere and rather wonderful music, which says a great deal with very few notes.

Contemporary music is a notably broad church, and Albert L. Travis's **Variations on 'Hyfrydol'** ploughs a very different furrow from Matthew Martin and Judith Weir. Distler too, for that matter. The very familiar hymn is given a musicianly and practically minded treatment, using tried and tested compositional devices, and will be of use to both recitalists and liturgical players. Much of it is straightforward to play, but the toccata which closes the work contains some surprisingly fiddly double pedalling. A friendly harmonic idiom prevails throughout.

STEPHEN FARR

## CHORAL MUSIC

### Nico Muhly: *Friday Afternoons*

Upper voices & pno

Chester Music 0206779 272978, £4.99

### Maja S.K. Ratkje: *Sirkling (Circling)*

Girls' choir (unacc.)

Edition Wilhelm Hansen/Wise Music ISBN 979-0-66134-485-8, £8.99

### Phillip Faber: *O Magnum Mysterium*

Treble voices (SSAA) & string quartet

Edition Wilhelm Hansen/Wise Music, ISBN 978-87-589-4162-4, £2.75

'Friday Afternoons' is a Snape Maltings-led singing project inspired by the legacy of Benjamin Britten and his collection of 12 songs, *Friday Afternoons*, composed in 1933-35. The project connects teachers and young people with contemporary composers via commissions and is underpinned by the vision that young people should have access to high quality music experiences through using their voice. Nico Muhly's contribution to this project is a particularly fine set of songs and presents a fantastic opportunity for young singers to experience the writing of this leading composer. **Friday Afternoons** by Nico Muhly is a collection of eight songs based on traditional texts by Charles Kingsley, Robert Louis Stevenson, Mark Twain and the Northumbrian folk songs the *Oak and the Ash* and *The Bird Song*.

Not unlike some of the original *Friday Afternoons* songs composed by Benjamin



STREINISAND

▲ Nico Muhly: his *Friday Afternoons* for upper voice resonates with Britten's aims

Britten, they feature some highly distinctive piano accompaniments, some of which, *From A Railway Carriage* in particular, are acknowledged as 'difficult' but are exhilarating, edgy, beautifully balanced and will act as a strong musical foundation for confident singing. Vocally, the writing throughout all the songs is well placed for the young voice and there is a range of both unison and part writing. I love the accompaniment in *Autumn* with its modal feel which evokes a mysterious feeling and acts as a sensitive backing for the beautiful melodic vocal lines.

In tune with the legacy of Benjamin Britten and a speech that he gave in Aspen, Colorado in 1964 when he said: 'I want my music to be of use to people, to please them, to enhance their lives...' I think these heartening pieces by Muhly resonate strongly with this sentiment and indeed with the original *Friday Afternoons* pieces composed by Benjamin Britten. These new songs could be a brilliant addition to the singing experience of a young choir with their mix of traditional texts and folk melodies, covering so many timeless human experiences, and

with their fresh, contemporary musical colour.

New on the musical horizon in Scandinavia is an exciting composition: **Sirkling (Circling)** by Maja S.K. Ratkje with a text by Monica Aasprong, written for the Norwegian Girls' Choir (premiered in Oslo, 2019) which contextualises challenges of our time – the environment, nature conservation and transformation – by considering cycles of nature. In Norwegian and with a full English translation, the work fluctuates between six and eight parts with an extravaganza of vocal sounds and effects based on rhythmic ostinato and sustained lines arching from the distinctive northern European pitching of G below middle C to some glissandos up to top C (which will not be considered desirable by all). The composer is also known as an exciting singer in Norway and this is evident in the vocal writing throughout, which does not fight shy of going to the edge of what might be possible. Although a challenging piece, with several repetitive motifs in each of the four sections, I would suggest that the work is possible to learn in well planned rehearsals and could be a striking piece

►



## CHORAL SELECTION



### Kathleen Allan, Mack Wilberg, Will Todd and Brahms tick all the boxes

A number of people have recently asked me how I choose the music for review in this column. It's very simple – publishers send me stuff and I look at it all, choose the pieces

that particularly interest me (or that seem to have a degree of importance attached to them) and write my article. Time and space being short, that generally means I choose pieces about which I can be largely positive. But I see quite a few pieces which would be great if it weren't for some particular problem. This month, rather than ignore these altogether, I thought I might write first about some that fall into this category. After all, it's only my opinion...

Gerald Near's **Ye Watchers and ye Holy Ones** (SATB & org; Morning Star, Aureole Editions AE 155, US\$2.50), based on the familiar tune 'Lasst uns erfreuen', gets off to a dazzling start. But 20 bars in he introduces a fanfare-like section for the organ that goes nowhere and contributes nothing, and this material appears four more times in the anthem. All this is a pity since the choral writing is stylish and effective. (The role model here is Bairstow's 'Blessed City', never bettered.) The opening Kyrie from **Missa Brevis** by George Arthur (SATB unacc.; Universal Edition UE 21 722,

## Particularly effective is the second section of the motet, which conveys the idea of moving water

£7.99) also promises much – interesting harmonies and engaging interplay between the parts – but as we move through the Gloria, each part seems to have become stuck in one tonal region of about a sixth, only occasionally venturing beyond this confine. To be fair, the Sanctus moves everything up about a fifth, but the Benedictus and Agnus bring us back to where we were, giving the whole setting a penned-in feeling. I can't help feeling that Arthur has somehow missed a trick here. There is much to admire in **Sicut Cervus** by Phillip Faber (mixed voices, unacc.; Edition Wilhelm Hansen WH 33174, £3.99), which the composer describes as 'a comment on Palestrina's masterpiece.' Particularly effective is the second section of the motet, which cleverly conveys the idea of moving water. The different passages of music – some with more, some with less movement – are bound together by a common pulse of 100 units a minute, which suits all the music except the opening. This is cast in compound time, and it is the quaver that is 100 to the minute, so the dotted crotchet is eye-crossingly slow. Only the most resonant of acoustics would give the first 31 bars a chance of success.

So, let us turn to some recent publications that tick all the boxes.

I enjoyed **Softly There Falls the Silver Rain** by Kathleen Allan

(SATB (div) unacc.; Boosey & Hawkes 48024229, £1.99)

on first reading and enjoyed it more on further study.

The text is a poem by the Canadian poet Marjorie Pickthall, and author and composer have conspired to illustrate those few moments just in advance of a fall of rain. Singers will need a keen ear to keep in tune – literally – with the composer's harmonic journey, but their reward will be to enjoy the deft marriage of words and music in lines such as 'Aeolian sighings lift and fall'.

Mack Wilberg offers us 'two-for-the-price-of-one' with an arrangement of Praetorius's tune that may be sung to one of two sets of words – **O Splendor of God's Glory Bright** or **That Easter Day with joy was bright** (SATB & org/orch; Oxford University Press 9780193531871, £2.55). If your taste is for a jolly 6/8 accompaniment with relatively simple chorus work, then this has your choir's name on it. It would be too easy (and wrong) to say that there is no artistry here. Much of the pedal bass relies on the dominant and, interestingly, the sub-dominant, and the penultimate verse is a canon.

Will Todd brings us a new setting of **Locus Iste** (SATB & pno; Oxford University Press 9780193531833, £2.20) and it is a classic example of understated craftsmanship. You may argue that the choir doesn't do much; or that the music does not take us on much of a journey. But the point of Todd's piece is that we perceive stillness as depicted by the choir through the *perpetuum mobile* provided by the small balletic steps of the piano accompaniment. If your choir can subdivide 7/8 into 2+2+3 and maintain genuinely soft singing for nearly four minutes (the loudest marking is *mp*), this piece is for you.

Finally, a new edition of Brahms's **Vier Quartette** (Four Quartets) op.92 (SATB & pno; Carus 9.401, €14.95). Brahms always intended that these beautiful settings should be published with an English singing text as well as the original German. Carus has set these out with great clarity. The pianist may well find no.1 a challenge, and the vocal lines will stretch the technique of the singers, but if you have the resources – go for it. Here are nine minutes of pure romantic bliss.

*After an early career as a freelance choral director and counter-tenor, Jeremy Jackman was a member of the King's Singers for ten years. In 1990 he resumed a career in conducting and leading workshops. He is currently musical director of the English Baroque Choir, and the Cecilian Singers in Leicester. [jeremyjackman.co.uk](http://jeremyjackman.co.uk)*



◀ to consider. The textures are refreshingly open and the instructions for moving the position of the singers and for specific stage lighting at times will make this a spectacularly dramatic piece.

A further piece from Scandinavia which stands out is by the Danish composer and director of the Danish Girls' Choir Phillip Faber: **O Magnum Mysterium**. The work mixes a tone of the ancient Latin *O Magnum Mysterium* text with a verse of the pilgrim hymn *Fair is creation* which is woven into the texture. Again, the composer, because of his professional work also as a choral conductor, has an acute understanding of the potential of the young female voice and places the voices comfortably and effectively throughout the four vocal lines. Like the Norwegian piece, the textures are beautifully open, allowing the voices to shine through and are supported by gentle lilting strings. All of these noted publications present music to challenge and inspire, rooted in the past but looking optimistically forwards and would be very well worth the journey of learning.

JOY HILL

### Beethoven: Kyrie based on the Adagio of the 'Moonlight' Sonata

Sabine Bock (ed.), Gottlob Bierey (arr.)  
SATB chorus, 2 fl, 2 ob, 2 cl, 2 fag, 2 hn, strs  
Carus 28.009/00, full score, €15.95



Choral arrangements of instrumental masterpieces have become quite the thing in recent

years. Barber's famous Adagio has morphed into *Agnus Dei* ('O Lamb of God'), Elgar's celebrated 'Nimrod' Variation has been transformed into *Lux aeterna* ('Light eternal'), and Mahler's iconic Adagietto has become *Kein deutsche Himmel* ('No German sky'). Samuel Barber only had himself to blame for arranging the slow movement of his op.11 String Quartet for chamber orchestra, and almost thirty years later, in 1967, turning it into a choral number. But Barber can't be held responsible for the woodwind band version by John O'Reilly (which dates from the same year as Barber's own choral arrangement), or the earlier clarinet ensemble version by Lucien Cailliet of 1964, or indeed the 1949 organ version by William Strickland (although Barber did say that if anybody must transcribe the Adagio for organ, it should be Strickland himself). John Cameron's award-winning eight-voice transcription of Elgar's most famous tune and Gérard Pesson's lush 13-voice transcription of the slow movement of Mahler's 5th symphony were both made in the mid-1990s, and both have become hits when performed by competent choirs.

If you have a problem with any of the above, then you might really disapprove of the opening movement of Beethoven's 'Moonlight' Sonata masquerading as a Kyrie. And which product of the internet age is to blame for this apparent travesty? Well, actually, a contemporary of Beethoven's – Gottlob Bierey. Bierey was a talented German musician, who took over from Weber as director of music in Breslau (now Wrocław in western

Poland). Most successful as a composer of comic opera, Bierey wrote in all manner of genres, including some cantatas and a Mass setting. And while Bierey may not primarily have been a purveyor of sacred music, he knew enough about singing to run a leading church choir, and he knew how voices work in combination through his operatic work.

The Kyrie that Gottlob Bierey created out of the opening movement of Beethoven's 'Moonlight' Sonata is scored for four-voice choir accompanied by double woodwind, a pair of horns, and strings. C sharp minor is a friendly piano key, but less so for stringed and wind instruments, so Bierey moved the movement down a semitone to C minor. The well-known right-hand arpeggiated figure sits well when spread across the two violin parts and the choral writing is entirely convincing, since it fleshes out the harmony of the original in an uncomplicated and respectful manner. One of the horns takes the sustained theme that begins with a dotted rhythm and the overall sound is compelling. As the movement progresses the texture augments in typically early 19th-century fashion, and the text (because it is simple, familiar, and repetitive) never gets in the way. This really is a very fine and worthy arrangement (and please try to forgive the ignorant surprise in my tone). For those who are prepared to be convinced, there also exists an *Agnus Dei* arranged by Bierey out of the second movement of Beethoven's C minor Piano Sonata, op.10, no.1, but Carus so far only publishes that in a version for choir and piano.

JEREMY SUMMERLY

## BOOKS

### Organ Building in Georgian and Victorian England: The Work of Gray & Davison, 1772-1890

Nicholas Thistlethwaite  
Boydell Press, February 2020, ISBN 978-1783274673, h/b, 577pp, £65



There have been precious few landmark publications on the British organ, its construction, use,

patronage and builders, but noteworthy was Nicholas Thistlethwaite's *The making of the Victorian organ*, first published in 1990. It re-established the 19th-century English organ builder, William Hill, in the position he deserved, in turn demoting the hagiographic writings on Father Willis to their proper place and providing a secure framework for other researchers to fill some of the gaps, especially of those builders who worked outside the metropolis. Meanwhile, over the last 30 years Dr Thistlethwaite has been hard at work on a fine history of the successor firms of the Gray family and Gray & Davison (G&D). While the page count is much the same, the word count must be considerably higher, with dense text interspersed by many good illustrations and photographs.

The author was instrumental in ensuring the restoration of one of the firm's great survivals, the instrument now standing in St Anne, Limehouse (formerly in the 1851 Great Exhibition). Here, by focusing on one dynasty and its successor business, he expands the timespan, while narrowing the focus. This is not a technical description of the firm's wide, varied and often novel output, ▶





COURTESY NICHOLAS THISTLETHWAITE

▲ Gray &amp; Davison entered their organ for St Anne, Limehouse, in the Great Exhibition

but it draws on the voluminous documentation that remained when G&D closed in 1970. This survived due to the foresight of the late Michael Gillingham, who purchased the records, thus ensuring an all too rare opportunity for an industrious

historian to demonstrate how such an instrument-making firm worked, including information on those who laboured at the bench, voicing machine and on-site installation. The documents now rest in the Cadbury Research Library, home

of the British Organ Archive and, with Hill's shop, volumes were at the heart of the creation of the British Institute of Organ Studies (BIOS). I, for one, am touched that the book is dedicated to its officers and members.

Appreciating the volume's structure requires concentration. It divides the work of the two eponymous periods, sets out the cultural and musical context of the times and provides rich biographical background, followed by a detailed examination of the output of the firm and its customers. Given the 118 years of the firms' lives these two chapters are substantial. The book pivots on an introduction to Frederick Davison himself, the 'German system' which he did so much to develop, with much

on his relationships with Henry Gauntlett, William Hill, the Wesleys and his ownership of the *Musical World*.

Perhaps the greatest legacy of this masterly book will be to deter future 'improvers' from tampering with the surviving instruments of these great organ builders. It does appear that validation in print can add significantly to their salvation. As if the industry of the book were not enough, it is accompanied by an 'Online supplement' of work lists and detailed supporting documentation. In its own right this deserves praise for the perseverance that led to its production and the clarity of the results, setting the standard for future projects.

JAMES BERROW

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# ENCOUNTERS

ELIZABETH SPRAKE, PIAS NATIONAL PROMOTIONS MANAGER – CLASSICS



MAGGIE HAMILTON

One of the first classical pieces that I listened to and thought, “Wow, I have to sit and be quiet with this,” was Steve Reich’s *Music for 18 Musicians*. I hadn’t ever heard anything like it: it felt like beautiful sunlit motets streaming into my head. I’d never experienced music in that way before.

I’ve been working at PIAS (which merged with harmonia mundi) for five years. After six months as HM’s press & marketing intern, I transitioned straight into press officer and fully into the world of classical music. It was a huge learning curve: I don’t come from a musical background, so an entirely new world opened up for me.

It took me a while to appreciate that coming into this industry without a music degree is no bad thing. We’re always thinking about how to get new audiences, and if you come from a very musical background, maybe with Grade 8 or conservatoire training, you can forget how intimidating it can be for other people. Sometimes it feels like a world you don’t think you can enter. But someone who

has been thrown into it, as I have, may better understand how to present things in a way that is not intimidating, while also not being patronising, and that says it’s OK to enjoy listening to pop music as well as Beethoven. At the end of the day, a good pop artist is a good artist. Beethoven was a genius, but he was a fantastic artist and creator of music.

One thing I always try to arrive at with my projects is that anybody can like this. Obviously someone with a more formative musical background and experience may be able to appreciate the nuance of the music more; but nobody is incapable of listening to a beautiful piece of music and appreciating the artistry, the effort. We don’t expect only people with an art degree to visit a gallery, so we shouldn’t present a classical release or concert as something that can only be appreciated if you have significant prior musical knowledge – we need to start from the ground up and prioritise music in children’s lives, at school and at home, and present it as something to be truly enjoyed – not an enforced challenge with grades that must be mechanically ticked off.

Classical music is already in people’s lives more than they realise. Some of the music written for video games, TV programmes and films is incredibly complex; people hear soundtracks now and want to buy them on vinyl as collector’s items. As an industry, we need to not look down on these pieces or dismiss them as too mainstream; it’s contemporary music within the classical sphere. But I don’t think we should push people – it’s not an automatic leap from *Lord of the Rings* to listening to the *Missa solemnis*.

There is still some perception that streaming services are bad for the music industry because the financial margin is less than selling a CD. With streaming, people don’t necessarily listen to the entire album, maybe just one or two highlighted tracks that happened to make it into a playlist. But through Spotify, Deezer and Apple Music we have access to a massive potential audience who maybe wouldn’t have wandered into a shop and picked up that CD, and that has to be a good thing. What I think streaming services could do better is to find a way to filter the metadata to suit classical repertoire, rather than simply by artist, which is geared to rock and pop. The average listener is unlikely to download a specialist classical streaming service if they’ve already got Apple or Spotify, so we need to put more effort into growing classical music’s presence within the main platforms. Some people think streaming is the death knell of the CD – I don’t think CDs will die, but I think we must accept that they’re going to be a smaller part of the market. We need to embrace that and look at what we can get from streaming, and how we can make it work for us better. We live in a soundbite culture: if it takes more than three minutes to process it, you don’t process it. It’s almost viewed as a luxury to sit and listen without doing anything else. We need some of these wellness bloggers to go to concerts and extol the benefits of sitting and appreciating music for an hour or two at a time. If people can listen to them talking about what stupid thing they shouldn’t be eating, why can’t they listen to them talking about which beautiful piece of music they should hear? ■

*Elizabeth Sprake was talking to the Editor.*







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